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PERSONAL REMINISCENCES
OF
GENERAL SKOBELEFF.



Генералъ-адъютантъ С. С. Скобелевъ

GENERAL SKOBELEFF.

From a Photograph taken at Geok Tepe, in February, 1881.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES
OF
GENERAL SKOBELEFF

BY
V. I. NEMIROVITCH-DANTCHENKO.

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY
E. A. BRAYLEY HODGETTS.

*With Portraits of the General and his Father, and a
Facsimile of Skobelev's Handwriting.*

LONDON:
W. H. ALLEN & CO., 13 WATERLOO PLACE,
PALL MALL, S.W.

PUBLISHERS TO THE INDIA OFFICE.

1884.

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LONDON:
PRINTED BY W. H. ALLEN & CO., 13 WATERLOO PLACE. S.W.

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My book is not a biography of Skobelev, but a series of reminiscences and fragments written down whilst the sense of the heavy loss which we have sustained in this remarkable man's death is still fresh in my mind. There will be found in these pages details which some may, perhaps, consider too trivial for notice. But to understand fully a character so composite and many-sided as Skobelev's, it seems to me that the most minute particulars should be taken into account. I have here and there quoted the opinions of the deceased on subjects of national importance. These views may not always be shared, but they should be published. I greatly regret that the conditions under which Russian writers are forced to work do not permit me to render Skobelev's convictions in all their completeness; they would have the effect of considerably altering public opinion concerning him. In preparing this work I have been forced to refer to my "Diary," and to quote entire pages from it; this was inevitable.

THE AUTHOR.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

IN presenting this translation to the public, we feel that no apology is needed. Skobelev as a soldier and Skobelev as a man may not prove uninteresting either to the long-suffering general reader or to the student of contemporary military history.

M. Nemirovitch-Dantchenko was a friend of Skobelev's, and writes from personal knowledge, a knowledge acquired in peace and war, in the camp and in the field; he has, therefore, had every opportunity of studying and appreciating the remarkable man he describes.

We have a word to say with regard to our own work. M. Nemirovitch-Dantchenko wrote in 1882, at a period of national excitement, when Skobelev's death was still a thing as of yesterday. He may, therefore, be excused for devoting considerable space to subjects which can be but of little interest to the British public. Of this nature is his description of the funeral which occupies a whole chapter. A detailed account of the progress of the mortal remains of General Skobelev from Moscow to his estates, a graphic representation of the public grief at the death of the popular hero would be tedious in translation,

and we have consequently omitted them. Some other trifling omissions have been made for the same reason.

Skobelev was one of the most remarkable personages of his time. In a country where favour and patronage are the surest roads to promotion, and where official society is permeated with corruption, the General stood alone. He had risen entirely by his own merits, in spite of his relations, his friends, and his numerous enemies, and the petty jealousies that surrounded him. Yet he had won his general's epaulettes at thirty, and held a higher rank in the army than his father whilst that father still lived.

Skobelev was always erratic, and the conventionalities of society he held in utter contempt. Indeed, had he not possessed so strong an individuality and so unruly a spirit, he must inevitably have succumbed to the stifling atmosphere of Court life. Born in 1845, he had originally determined to devote himself to study; but during his university life his eccentricities were so expensive, and his debts so enormous, that his father refused to aid him any more. Young Skobelev then turned to the military profession and entered the Guards; but here again his extravagances exceeded his father's good nature, and he was obliged to leave the capital. He joined a cavalry regiment stationed at Warsaw, where he saw some little active service in suppressing the Polish rebellion. As might be expected, he did not effect any great economy by this change, and his expenditure showed no signs of decreasing; so he was obliged to quit

Warsaw, and joined the Turkistan army. In 1868 he commanded a sotnia of Cossacks, and in 1871 he was already on the staff of the Grand Duke Michael. He joined the expedition to Khiva, and, distinguishing himself under General Kaufmann, was the last to leave Khiva with McGahan, the *Daily News* correspondent. In the short interval of peace which ensued, he went to Spain, and there studied the system of fighting at long ranges in which the Carlists indulged. But he was soon back again in Russia, and, joining the Khokand expedition, he so distinguished himself that he rapidly rose to the rank of General.

As yet, however, his talents were not recognised by Russian military authorities, and his victories over the "Dressing-gowns," as the Turkomans were contemptuously called, inspired but little respect. When the war with Turkey broke out in 1877, he was, therefore, not at first entrusted with a command, but attached to his father's staff. The arrangement, however, was not destined to last long: it was impossible for the most envious even to ignore his claims to consideration, and he soon became the favourite of the Commander-in-Chief, the Grand Duke Nicholas. During the passage of the Danube he shouldered a musket like a private, and he accomplished so many deeds of daring, that his name was soon in everybody's mouth. It was not till the battle of Plevna, however, that his talents as a military leader had full play. He inspired his men with a devotion hardly equalled by Napoleon's grenadiers. The

enthusiasm with which his troops charged the enemy was unrivalled. They bore the onslaught of overwhelming masses bravely; and when forced to retreat, they did so cheerfully and in splendid order. His methods were original. Generally, before an engagement, he would call the non-commissioned officers together and hold a sort of council of war. He would explain to them his plans, and frequently asked their advice, not disdaining to profit by the shrewd practical common sense of these simple-minded warriors, who freely gave him the benefit of their opinion.

He rode to battle clad in white, decked with orders, scented and curled, like a bridegroom to a wedding, his eyes gleaming with wild delight, his voice tremulous with joyous excitement.

The Turks called him Akh-Pasha, the White General, and stood in mortal fear of him. After one of the assaults on Plevna he is thus described by McGahan:—"He was in a fearful state of excitement and fury. His uniform was covered with mud and filth, his sword broken, his Cross of St. George twisted round his shoulder, his face black with powder and smoke, his eyes haggard and bloodshot, and his voice quite gone. He spoke in a hoarse whisper. I never before saw such a picture of battle as he presented. I saw him again in his tent at night; he was quite calm and collected."

Fear he seems never to have experienced, and, like our own Nelson, appeared unable to form a conception of it.

Before Plevna Skobelev proved himself an unparalleled fighting general and a wonderful "Hau-Degen" (to use a German expression); the passage of the Balkans, the battle of Shipka, and the capture of Adrianople showed him to be a strategist and tactician as well. That march across the Balkans was a truly grand and heroic feature in the campaign of 1877-78.

Skobelev's subsequent career is so well known and still so fresh in everybody's mind, that we will not here describe it. How he took Geok Teppé, how he frightened the English by coming alarmingly near Merv, how he startled the Germans by making Pan-slavistic speeches in Paris,—are these things not written in the chronicles of the daily press?

His personal appearance was pleasing, and even fascinating. He had very regular and well-cut features, a firm and handsome mouth, clear blue eyes, and a goodly supply of whisker. His figure was elegant and graceful, and he was rather a dandy in his dress.

If we may not feel ready to subscribe to all Skobelev's views as represented in the following pages, we shall learn much of the state of Russian public opinion from them, and we must at least admit that Skobelev was a splendid general, a generous man, and an original, if not always, perhaps, a logical, thinker.

E. A. BRAYLEY HODGETTS.

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GENERAL SKOBELEFF.

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE Hotel Duseaux, at Moscow, behold an enormous, silent crowd. Under a burning sun, their eyes filled with tears, the people of Moscow stood bare-headed. The crowd had collected from every corner of the town, and stood in reverent silence. The only noises interrupting the general quiet were those of vehicles bumping against the pavement stones, and the occasional shouts of the police, working zealously with their elbows, for undividable state reasons, among the awe-stricken throng. The crowd increased. Every minute more and more people joined it, crossing themselves and fixing their gaze stolidly on two windows of the hotel, the blinds of which had not yet been pulled down, as was subsequently done.

"There?" someone asked.

"*Can* he be dead?" muttered another.

At those windows forms were continually appearing, disappearing, and re-appearing. Now it was the tearful

face of a lady, now the epaulets of a general officer, now the gold-laced uniform of some court functionary. What were these to him? What had they in common with him while he yet lived?

"Why don't they hold mass outside?" was indignantly suggested.

"They say it has not been held in there yet."

But was it possible that Skobelev could be dead? And the bare idea seemed absurd. One saw all those circumstances of woe, those wild-looking faces, those praying, weeping thousands and yet he hoped there might, after all, be some mistake. One expected somebody to come to the window and proclaim that the White General had returned to consciousness.

But, alas! no one came with the welcome news. The people could see through the windows how a young aide-de-camp was leaning against a wall and sobbing. Carriages after carriages drove up, sad-faced people alighted from them; everyone seemed stricken with grief. His death had come like a blow from above; the pain was not yet felt, but a numbness had seized on all.

"What is the matter? What is it?" was heard on all sides.

But these questions were met with silence, as though the people were afraid of disturbing the rest of their favourite—the favourite of eighty millions, marked by the finger of Providence at such an early age, and so untimely laid low by an unknown and mysterious power, as though he had been blown away. Only yesterday he had been working, preparing for great

undertakings. Only the other day he had been the centre of a thousand hopes and aspirations. And now—suddenly! One might well lose his head!

At the door of the hotel I met an acquaintance, the tears in his eyes, wild and disturbed.

“I say, what does this mean?”

He replied in broken sentences, the words seemed to fall from his mouth without volition.

The apartments occupied by the General were already full of people. The crowd opened out silently to let people pass, conversation was carried on in whispers, people seemed even to sob in an undertone. There was Lieutenant-Colonel Baranoff, Skobelev’s favourite aide-de-camp: the last time we had met was at Constantinople. Under what circumstances do we meet again? Skobelev is not, and there is none to take his place.

Another aide-de-camp accosted me. “Our General is dead!” he exclaimed, and burst into tears.

What strange people were here, evidently come on business! There is the reporter of a Moscow paper, running about from one place to another; clearly he had lost his head. There was the photographer Panoff, sitting near the door, an immovable mass of grief. There was some general of the line standing in the middle of the room, petrified.

“Your Excellency!” said someone to him.

“We have been struck by lightning, Sir, by lightning! After that, try to believe in Providence. Where is truth—where?” he answered.

A lady, all in tears, passed us gently. She was a relation of the General’s. The Governor-General was

there; he had evidently not yet grasped the full meaning of his loss, but was, nevertheless, quite overcome with it.

“Only yesterday,” said one of Skobeleff’s aides-de-camp, “he was well and hearty, laughed and joked with us; to-day they came to me, to say he was dead! I scolded my servant, and thought the General was at his practical jokes again. He would often serve us such tricks. Placing himself behind the door with a glass of water, he would wait for us to come running in, and salute us with the contents. I thought he was playing his old pranks, and entered the room cautiously; and there he lay—he was not cold yet. O God! O God!”

Two military doctors were here too, and here, also, was an elegant Petersburg general in full uniform; this gentleman seemed to be too much occupied with his own personal appearance, however, to comprehend the situation. Close to him I recognised a distinguished officer who had won for himself the title of “the greatest donkey in the Russian army” during the Turkish campaign. He was addressing the general of the line, who was still standing like a statue in the middle of the room.

“It must be admitted Skobeleff was a good general; not at all a bad general!” the “greatest donkey” remarked, in an authoritative tone of voice.

The uncouth general of the line, a bow-legged, red-nosed son of Mars, grew redder in the face, puffed and blew, and replied: “If he was not bad, then what must we, your Excellency, be after that? We might be

permitted to clean his boots, but we are scarcely worthy even of that."

The carpet-general was dumb-founded.

"The corps has suffered a great loss in him," muttered a pale-faced young officer of the general staff with sentimental black eyes.

"Not merely the corps, nor even the army; the whole nation, Sir."

Mass was to be held at one. A tall, handsome priest with black wavy hair falling on his shoulders, and a well-kempt beard, showed himself bashfully at the door with the eucharist. A soft odour of cypress and incense was wafted through the air. The golden rays of the sun grew broader in the rooms, and fell on the golden epaulets, the orders and decorations, red ribbons and stars of the assembled grandees.

"Why are these alive? Why are not they lying cold on their bier, instead of him, who was so dear to us, and could so ill be spared?"

"Do you know the difference between him and all these here?" somebody said, in a whisper.

"No."

"If a bomb should explode here now, *they* would all fall down, but *he* would arise."

"He should be taken out and shown to the people! He belongs to the people, and not to those, who are only his friends now that he is dead! Let mass be held outside, the people want to pray for him."

And looking out through the window on that reverent throng, on those deeply-moved faces, I felt it was only there that the full magnitude of this loss

was understood as it ought to be. He should have been given to them, that no hypocritical phrase, no artificial tears might insult his remains. There, among the people, he would have been with his own, who knew and understood him, there sincere tears flowed for him, there he was prayed and mourned for.

Someone in the crowd began telling the bystanders the story of Skobelev's death, and the scandalous manner in which he had passed his last moments. An old peasant listened attentively, and at last broke in with :

“May God forgive him all his sins for the good he has done Russia. For his love for us simple people, for our tears for him, may God forgive him ! He was a man like the rest of us,—only he loved us more than himself.”

And the surrounding peasants hearing these words devoutly crossed themselves, and muttered their approval.

In another part of the assembled multitude, the following anecdote was being told :

“Some time back I was at Tyestoff's—the restaurant, you know—when who should come in but he. He marched up and sat down with some friends of his. I could not remain quiet. I went towards him and said, ‘Are you not the great Skobelev ?’ He sprang up politely, and asked, ‘Whom may I have the pleasure of speaking to ?’—‘My name is Bronitsky,’ I answered, ‘I am a peasant from ——.’ He seized my hand and gave it such a friendly, honest, manly grasp, that I went away nearly crying with pleasure. Ah ! he was a simple-minded man, and never despised the poor !”

Stories of this kind were recounted of him without number; soldiers who had served under him added their own personal recollections.

The body was brought out of the bed-room, in which it had been lying, into a small ante-chamber. The first mass partook of a sincere and heartfelt character, only those who had known the departed were admitted. As yet no guard of honour had been posted. When I entered I saw Skobelev lying on a table, covered with a pall of cloth of gold. He was not dressed, and the pall was pulled up to his chin. Loud sobs were audible around. The light fell full on that delicate, handsome face, adorned with a fair beard combed out on each side, and on that talented brow, surmounted by a mass of short dark hair. The face was perfectly calm and peaceful, but frightfully yellow. . . . When he was excited he looked much paler than he did now. He seemed to be asleep. A touching, tranquil expression lay on his lips. Every minute we almost expected him to awake and salute us with his youthful, gracious smile. Yes, he sleeps. But see! a fly is creeping over his face, it has crept on to his eyes, it is crawling along his eye-brows; it has stopped, and scratches its wing with its foot. Somebody drives it away—it flies back again; but no, he does not awake—alas, he is dead! The waves of light pouring in through the still uncovered window give a strange animation to that fixed countenance. Without moving a muscle, it appears to be continually changing its expression. Every current of air agitates the wavy beard.

A merchant, who was standing gazing intently on the

corpse, at length whispered to his neighbour : " When the General was living he feared not death, and now even on his bier he laughs at it."

Looking on that corpse, I could not help thinking how many hopes and aspirations were being buried with it. What ideas, what ardent schemes that arched brow had given birth to ! How many stormy battle-fields, over which the Russian standard would have floated triumphantly, were lost to him for ever ! It seemed as though his thoughts, like bees, were still flying round that head. And what thoughts those were, with what brilliancy they shone ! Those dreams of the world-wide power of his country, of her strength and her glory, and of the happiness and prosperity of her allies, friends, and kindred nations ; of the ruin of her enemies, their hopeless, irreparable ruin ! A hundred fights, a tempest of volleys, ten thousand victims, scattered on the field, weltering in their blood—the joyous " hurrah ! " of the glorious victory, to be followed by peace and progress—dreams of Slavonic liberty and the free union of Slavonic nations. . . . And all dead with that clayey corpse, not yet decomposed, but already cold and stiff. Those dreams threatening the enemy like storm-clouds, and apparently on the point of bursting on them, had now to be consigned to the past, could never now be realised. What irony of fate ! To give a man genius, the eagle eye of a general, the fabulous valour of a mythological hero, to lead him unscathed through a thousand deaths, through a very hell, and to mow him down in the midst of peace and safety ! What a malicious trick of fortune !

"What did he die of?" I heard asked.

"They say of paralysis of the heart," was the vague rejoinder.

"Well, my friend, when you and I die, won't we have paralysis of the heart, too? Then is it not like saying that his decease was caused by death?"

Out of doors not a few curious episodes occurred. One soldier with the cross of St. George on his breast, who was passing, seeing the crowd, asked the reason of their excitement.

"The General is dead."

"What General?"

"Why, Skobelev."

"What!" At first the soldier could not believe he had heard aright.

"Skobelev is dead."

"Skobelev dead?" said the soldier, incredulously. "Nonsense, old fellow; Skobelev will not die—not yet awhile!"

"I tell you he is dead!"

"There must be some mistake there; only Skobelev is not going to die—that is all nonsense, it is impossible for Skobelev to die." And the obstinate veteran calmly pursued his walk. On his way he met a friend.

"How foolish the people are!" he exclaimed.

"Why?"

"They have been told that Skobelev is dead, and they believe it—ha, ha, ha! as though Skobelev was going to die! What next? It may be some other fellow, only not our Skobelev; he is not dead yet!"

One very old, tottering veteran, came to see the General as he was lying in state. After looking at him for a long time, he muttered: "We had only one like that, and him God has taken away! He is wrath with the Russian people, and in His wrath He has chastised us severely. Like Egypt in the days of old, so does he punish us."

Then, when he had nearly left the room, he suddenly turned back again, and exclaimed:

"You are happy now, and at rest; but what is to become of us without you?"

CHAPTER 11.

ON a day in the June of 1877 I was admiring the beautiful scenery of the Jourgievsky banks of the Danube. The blue expanse of the river was calm, not even the faintest breeze ruffled the sleeping waters. The rays of the sun were reflected along its mirrory surface far towards the right. In the distance I could descry islands covered with trees, behind which the masts of the Turkish fleet were just visible. The enemy's ships had got away from our guns into this quiet haven of safety, and were not to be coaxed out. There they lay motionless. A little behind them were the handsome roofs of a Turkish village, looking like tortoise-shells, from the midst of which there rose the tower of a white minaret. Armed with glasses, one could even detect the yellow earthworks of the Turkish batteries, and the immovable sentries. Green, cloud-like gardens touched the river-side, and when the wind blew from that quarter, it wafted over the scent of a thousand flowers. Still further, on the slope of a hill, were the innumerable white tents of the Turkish camp, and on

the summit, menacing in its attitude, like some wild beast about to spring on its prey, lay the stern fortress of Levant-Tabi. I contemplated the peaceful, happy landscape, and found it difficult to reconcile the smiling scene around me with war and devastation; but there was no ignoring those monitors, those batteries, those innocent white tents. Yet none of these seemed terrible; all was so quiet and still. I was awakened from my reverie by a voice behind me, with the words:

“Whom may I have the honour of addressing?”

I turned round, and beheld a young and handsome general. “Too dandified to be a good soldier,” I inwardly muttered. But on looking at those fearless blue eyes, and the energetic and determined mouth, I instantly repented my hasty judgment. I told him my name.

“Very pleased to make your acquaintance. Yours is no easy task. The war-correspondent is the spy-glass through which Russia regards us. You are an eye-witness, and much depends on you. It is your duty to point out the true heroes and workers, and to unmask cowards and pharisees. I have not met you before—my name is Skobeleff.”

“I reported myself to your father yesterday.”

“Ah! to the Pasha!” he exclaimed, laughing. “You know, I call my father the Pasha; it is only my boyish fun. I am sorry I did not see you. Where are you staying?”

I gave him my address.

“The music will soon begin now.”

“What music?” I inquired, somewhat puzzled.

“Well, you see, as soon as I or my father show our noses, that little battery over there opens fire.”

The music commenced earlier than I expected. A white cloud burst from the earthworks of the distant Turkish battery. In the course of three or four seconds the noise of firing was heard, and, trembling in the air, a shell appeared in the distance, and sank sighing into the Danube, sending up a fountain of clear crystal spray.

“That did not come near enough,” Skobelev coolly remarked.

Another shell now flew over our heads, and exploded somewhere behind us.

“That went too far. If they have good marksmen over there, the next shot will just do it.”

As though they were not aiming at him, as though he were merely a disinterested spectator!

The third and fourth shells buried themselves in the banks of the river perilously near us, when an orderly came galloping up from Jourgievo.

“What is the matter? Has the Pasha got savage?”

“Your father is angry; you are opening the firing to no purpose.”

Skobelev smiled his gentle, indulgent, good-humoured smile, and said:

“All right; come along.”

It was Skobelev's regular practice thus to ride out towards the banks of the river, attended by a small party of officers, and as soon as he showed himself the Turkish batteries would open fire.

“What do you expose yourself like that for?” he was frequently asked.

“Oh, it does no harm. An exchange of shots is very wholesome now and then—besides, my fellows’ nerves will get used to that sort of thing, and that is worth something.”

Sometimes his father would join the young men. He stood under fire coolly, but kept continually growling.

“Now, what are you angry about, Father? If you don’t like it, go away, and leave us young fellows here.”

“I do not wear a general’s epaulets for the purpose of showing my back to those blackguards on the other side. Only what is the use of beginning all this—what is the use of it?”

“Do you mean someone might get embalmed?”

In young Skobeleff’s phraseology, to get embalmed meant to get shot.

“Well, yes.”

“Anything else? How could they hurt us? But then, if they did, it would be only war. We have been sticking here doing nothing long enough; it is getting monotonous. In Turkestan things were more lively.”

“Against those dressing-gowns of Turcomans?”

“Yes, against the Dressing-gowns; but then we were sometimes fifty to one. Gentlemen, shall I conjure my father away? I know an infallible charm.”

“How will you accomplish that?”

“Oh, I will show you. Papa, you know, I have no money—not a farthing. I am quite cleaned out”;

and by way of confirmation he would turn his pockets inside out.

“What next? I have no money myself. I have spent it all”; and the old general, highly displeased, would ride off, leaving his son to his own devices.

Delighted with their success, the young men would take a boat, man it with Ural-Cossacks to row them, and go off reconnoitring along the Danube, in the face of the Turkish fire. This was called “taking exercise.”

As a matter of fact there was a great deal more sense in all this than appeared at first sight. Both Cossacks and officers were thus gradually familiarised with shells, and learned not only to joke, but to think and reason under fire. Dash and daring, and contempt for death, so important to the true soldier, were developed, and the topography of the Danube, with its islands, was completely mastered. At one of these reconnoitring expeditions it was my good fortune to “assist.” We were in a small fishing-boat, which pursued its devious course along the labyrinth of wooded islands that cover the Danube, exploring every creek and corner as though we were tracking somebody. A Turkish outpost, placed anywhere in the vicinity or hidden among the branches of the overhanging trees, could have assuredly shot us all down.

“Well, are your nerves collected?” Skobelev asked us.

“Yes.”

“Then you will turn out good soldiers.”

Some time afterwards I was driving from Banyas to Jourgievo. On my way I overtook a party of soldiers

marching to their respective quarters. The day was very hot and sultry, and the men were covered with perspiration; the plains, reflecting the rays of the sun, dazzled their eyes. We were soon joined by a cavalcade, which consisted of Skobelev and two or three officers.

"Good-morning, my men."

"Good health to your Excellency."

"It is hard work marching to-day. It is hot, is it not?"

"Yes, it is hard work, your Excellency."

Indeed they looked fatigued, their knapsacks weighed down their shoulders, and their boots, furnished by unprincipled Jews, pinched their feet most painfully, while they sank up to their ankles in sand at every step they took.

"Let me march with you, and see whether I can stand it"; and, suiting the action to the word, the General dismounted and gave his horse to a Cossack.

"Take it to Jourgievo. Good-bye, gentlemen, I am going to march with these fine fellows."

Soon the soldiers were laughing and joking; at last they struck up a song, and the General joined in the chorus.

"What did he talk to you about?" I afterwards asked them.

"He understands us; he asked one of us when he was going to get a commission. The poor fellow laughed. 'Never, I expect,' he said. 'Then you're a bad soldier,' says Skobelev; 'look at my ancestor, he was a peasant like you, tilled the soil, and yet he became a general.'"

"He is one of us," another soldier remarked.

"How do you mean?"

"He is of pure peasant extraction," was the proud reply.

Later such marches with his soldiers became habitual with Skobelev. It was thus he learned to know them, and they to understand him.

"He can see into your soul. He can see a hundred fathoms through the earth. He has no fear in him. He will show what he is made of yet." Such were the comments these rough critics passed on him, and they did credit to their penetration.

CHAPTER III.

It was on the 6th of June, old style, that Skobeleff was first seen in serious action on the Danube. At four versts from Jourgievo towards the east, was a picket; and at a short distance the 30th Don Cossacks, a company of skirmishers, and a detachment of sappers were encamped. This place was called Malorouge. On the opposite side of the Danube the Turks had planted powerful batteries, which commanded the river from a hillock and reached down to Rustchuck. For some reason or other, Malorouge seemed to rouse the Turks' ire most particularly, and was the object of the assiduous attentions of their artillery. This was quite reason enough for Skobeleff to like it, and he took daily rides to the place, the neighbourhood of which was completely furrowed with Turkish ammunition. Skobeleff speedily taught the troops quartered here a proper contempt for Turkish shells, and even the youngest soldier soon felt ashamed of ducking down before them. Here the sappers dug like moles, moving up one battery after another; and it was Skobeleff's delight to inspect their

work. On the day of which I am speaking, a large party of Russian newspaper correspondents had assembled at the outpost camp, which was constructed of ragged overcoats suspended on poles ; for the occupants had no tents and took pride in nothing but their weapons. The exploits of Bashtannikoff, the officer in command, who was subsequently decapitated by the Turks at Shipka, after being most horribly tortured, were highly entertaining. By way of passing the time Bashtannikoff, who was a favourite of Skobelev's, had, with the aid of the General, invented all manner of practical jokes at the Turks' expense. Sometimes they would get some brushwood and bind it together in the shape of a boat, and, having placed a sheaf of corn in it, wrapped in a cloak (to represent a Cossack), with a pole by its side to look like a lance, they would send it down the Danube. Soon the Turks would open fire on the presumptive Cossack, and a thousand purposeless bullets would fly into space, the alarm would be sounded and the encamped Turks would rush to arms expecting an attack. Sometimes even Turkish batteries would pour out their volleys on the inoffensive sheaf of corn floating down the river. On other occasions they would throw up earthworks in the night, bind straw together in the shape of brass guns and place them in the improvised embrasures. The Turks, on seeing the first rays of the morning sun reflected from these bundles of straw, would open a most determined fire on these batteries, which they supposed had been newly erected during the night, and thus wasted a great deal of ammunition. Sometimes Skobelev, accompanied by a

few soldiers, would make nightly raids into the enemy's country, and there work his sweet will on the foe, thus satisfying the cravings of his excitable temperament.

"He is one of us!" the soldiers would exultingly exclaim.

On the night in question, the outposts, standing in a circle, were singing their remarkable choral songs, solemn and melancholy, reminding one of church music. In the gloaming of a southern evening, with the camp fires glowing in the distance and the stars shining brightly above, these songs produced a deep impression.

"Ah! there are few old skirmishers left now," sighed Bashtannikoff, looking round.

"Why, are the new ones bad?"

"No, that is not what I mean. But one's heart had grown warm towards the old ones. We have crept up to the enemy at night together, we have lain in ambush together; and now—some are in their graves, some have gone home and become old women."

Afterwards their numbers decreased still more when they were employed in the attack like ordinary infantry, and this special and rare branch of the army was almost annihilated by the Turks.

The camp fires went out and left red patches behind them distinguishable in the dark night. The noise of voices and the conversation of the men could still be heard, but there was no more singing, only now and again a plaintive sound was carried through the air as though bewailing someone. . . . What was that? It sounded as if something was cracking in the distance!

There it was again ! And again ! We jumped up and mounted. The dry cracking sound grew louder. In nervous expectation of a general action we grew more and more excited. The camp rose to arms, horses were placed in position.

Out of surrounding darkness a Cossack galloped in upon us. "Where is the commanding officer of the regiment ?"

"What do you want ?" said D. I. Orloff.

The Cossack whispered something to him.

Another hundred Cossacks were ordered to mount. In the course of two or three minutes a dark mass of Cossacks was already on the march in the direction of the firing. At fifty paces their movements could no longer be distinguished. The firing grew brisker. Soon the whole neighbourhood resounded with it; other noises were drowned by it. There—that looked like a star flying through the air!

"Aha! they have commenced sending shrapnels, the affair is getting serious!"

The loud reports of cannon interrupted for a minute the musketry rattle, these were followed by others and others. The Jourgevsky battery replied. At this moment, riding on a white horse, and dressed in his white coat, Skobelev appeared at the river side; he looked as though he had come dressed for a ball.

"Is not a battle the soldier's ball?" he asked some one. "Now, at last, I feel happy!"

"Can the idea of battle make you happy?"

"What other effect could it produce? Is a soldier to cry at the prospect of a fight? War is our element!"

Saying these words, he gaily lighted a cigarette. A shrapnel exploded over his head, but the hand in which he held the lighted match did not even quiver.

"It is provoking to see such coolness," one of his companions remarked.

"My dear Sir, I have seen ten years of active service; wait a little, soon you will be cool too."

A little later, when the firing had died away, and the southern night had again wrapped us in poetic darkness, Skobelev galloped at full speed to Jourgievo. The wind was blowing straight in his face, and he was riding along with amazing swiftness, but he still spurred his steaming horse, urging it to greater speed.

"This is fun!" he shouted to a passing friend, and galloped on. He seemed to be surrounded by an atmosphere of strength, life, and energy. Soon afterwards he stopped on the bank of the Danube, with several officers of the staff, to reconnoiter. They formed a circle, their horses' heads all turned towards the centre, and commenced discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the situation. A loud crash interrupted them: a grenade had fallen amongst them and tore up a whole heap of earth, sending small stones and gravel into their faces. At that instant, when the question which presented itself most forcibly to everyone present was, "Am I wounded—is anyone hurt?" the collected voice of Skobelev was heard saying, "And now, gentlemen, we will resume"; and he continued his arguments with as much calmness and clearness as if nothing had happened—as if a branch had been broken under his horse's hoof, and nothing more.

But the army knew him already. He was already the friend and comrade of officers and men. To their youthful imagination he grew into a legendary hero, a giant. The pedants and the narrow-minded alone regarded him with distrust and jealousy; and that distrust and jealousy followed him to his death. Only now has it hidden itself. To be valued, to receive the reward and esteem which is one's due, it is necessary with us to die. Oh, mean age and mean people! How many friends he has now!—and then, how small was their number!

His tact in speaking with the men is known and understood alone by those who saw him with them. He had but to say half a word and they understood him. He knew them thoroughly. His lesson to some newly-joined recruits in attacking a fortress is an instance. There was about a hundred of them.

“Well, comrades, and how would you take a gun?”

“With a cheer, your Excellency.”

“With a cheer!—Well, and your brains! would you throw them away? Do you know what a shell is? Now, suppose you have cheered and charged, and the enemy fires off his guns,—twenty fellows lie dead. How many are left? Eighty. Twenty men stand out! Those are dead men, do you understand? They are gone. Well, what would you do then, so as to settle the business adroitly?”

“While the enemy was re-loading, your Excellency, we would fall on him, and give it him with the bayonet.”

“That's right my lads. That shows you have understood me. Now let's go to dinner,” and the

General would take a plain wooden ladle from the nearest soldier, and sit down at the common kettle.

"And he eats as we do, too," they would say, though there was scarcely anybody more dainty in that respect than Skobelev.

The above will help to explain how it was that Skobelev's popularity with his men during the late war, and even before the crossing of the Danube, grew amongst the Jourgievo divisions, not daily, but hourly. At first he surprised them, and then they all worshipped him, and grew as attached to him as children. The soldiers and the young officers, be it understood. Many regarded him at that early period as a stranger, as an outsider, the victor of Asiatic dressing-gown makers. But he was already envied even then. They envied him his youth, the Cross of St. George at his collar, his learning, his energy, and his tact in managing his subordinates. Profound turkey-cocks, who felt all the pangs of delivery whenever they gave birth even to the most attenuated idea, could not understand his active mind, that ever-working laboratory of thoughts, plans, and proposals.

"How could they like him?" said one of the best generals of the late war, who had at once become a friend of Skobelev's. "Why, they were sitting decorously at table, cackling so nicely, everything was going on so quietly and well, when suddenly there's an explosion, the roof tumbles in, and Skobelev flies down on the table with a portmanteau full of ideas, plans, projects, and knowledge of things they had never dreamt of."

Their dislike went so far, that they treated the

conqueror of Dressing-gowns like a boy. Any empty-brained talker would permit himself the most impertinent language to him.

"You got your St. George's Cross too easily; almost for nothing. Now you must show that you deserve it."

Skobelev, who knew his own value, would go about for weeks afterwards pale, almost green in the face, with unstrung nerves. Perhaps it was thus that the heart disease, which brought him to so early a grave, was first developed, if indeed he ever suffered from it.

Sometimes he was not even allowed to speak. The Napoleons of St. Petersburg only spluttered when the victor of the dressing-gowns dared to make any proposals, and when he proceeded to act they were ready to tear him to pieces. This military genius, whom the Academy has now recognised as equal to Souvoroff, was even openly insulted. Once when he had been making some reconnaissances which he considered of primary importance he was dismissed with the following words: "Go to my tent, and wait till I send for you." He grew ill from the insults and boredom he had to submit to.

"Do you know," he would often say, "I will give up everything, go back to Russia, and, when the war is over, throw off my uniform and retire into the country, and become a member of the Zemstvo (local government). Really I have not the strength to bear it. I know things are mismanaged, and when I say anything I am not even listened to. It is very hard."

The young General's voice would often falter with tremulous emotion when he returned from these un-

successful expeditions. Justice must be done to General Dragomiroff, however, who was perhaps the first to notice Skobeleff's military genius. The late Minister of War, Milioutin, also recognised the young General earlier than the rest.

CHAPTER IV.

NEVERTHELESS Skobelev was even less pleased with himself than anyone else. At Jourgievo, at Bio, at Zimnitsa—and later on in the trenches before Plevna—Skobelev studied and read continually. He contrived to get hold of military periodicals and books in all languages, not one of which went out of his hands without being profusely studded with marginal notes, bearing testimony to his military genius and critical faculty. He studied under the most trying and uncomfortable conditions—at bivouacs, in Bucharest, behind the earthworks of batteries under fire, in the intervals of battle. He never parted from his books, and shared his knowledge with all. To be in his company meant also to be continually learning. He expounded his views to his officers, explained his ideas to them, asked their advice, argued with them and listened to every opinion and objection. He studied the characters of his officers, too, and soon distinguished his future help-mates from the rest. General Doukhonin, the chief of staff of the 4th Army Corps, thus characterised Skobelev:—

“Our other good generals, Radetzky and Gourko,

seize only on some special qualities of a man, and are unable to profit by all his attainments and abilities. But Skobelev brought out all there was in his subordinates, and even more, for he encouraged them to improve and perfect themselves."

Sometimes at a convivial feast of young men he would suddenly ask them serious questions and set them all thinking. Glasses would be pushed aside, and the narrow circle would draw still more closely together and endeavour to solve some complicated strategic problem.

Skobelev was young, and was an admirer of the fair sex, but after his own fashion. He never surrendered his individuality or gave up his independence. It was one of his sayings that the military man should flee all entanglements and never succumb to the allurements of family life.

"Ignatius Loyola was only great because he was single and had no family. He who wants to do any big thing should remain single."

At Bucharest he was very much attracted by a Frenchwoman, with whom he succeeded in obtaining an interview. Imagine her astonishment when he stopped in the midst of an ardent conversation, went up to a table, pulled out a book, and became immersed in its perusal, occasionally making notes on a map! He would frequently leave the table at dinner and retire to his own room, where he would be found by the orderlies sent to him, poring over books. Later, to save time, he used to make his aide-de-camp carry a note-book, and any ideas or problems that occurred to him

would be instantly transferred to paper. To converse with him was always highly instructive. He knew how to awaken the brain, and to make a man think. To attain this object he would not stop at anything.

"It is not enough to be brave, one must be wise also and full of resource," he would tell his men, though he had a sort of greed for brave men. If he heard of any bold fellow he would try all he could to get him into his division. For this purpose he would employ all manner of cunning devices; make friends with the man's superiors, petition the commanding officer, and at the end he generally succeeded in getting his man, for which reason his division consisted of splendid soldiers, the very pick of the army. And the White General was the comrade not only of his officers, but also of his men.

One terribly hot day Skobelev, who was driving in a carriage, met a soldier dragging himself along under the scorching sun and bending under the load of his heavy knapsack.

"Hullo, comrade, it is hard work walking."

"Yes, your Excellency."

"Driving is more comfortable. The General here, more lightly clad, is driving, and you, poor fellow, have to walk and carry a knapsack too. That is not just, is it?"

The soldier did not know what to reply.

"Well, look here; get in, and sit by my side."

The poor soldier got quite confused. Was the General joking with him?

"Get in, I tell you."

The delighted private stepped into the carriage.

"Well, is it comfortable?"

"Splendid, your Excellency."

"When you are made a general you will drive in a carriage of your own also."

"How are the like of me to become generals?"

"Why, my ancestor began as a common soldier and left off as a general! What part of the country are you from?"

And here commenced a full inquiry into the family and circumstances of the soldier. When he reached his destination the man alighted, blessing the young General for his kindness. Of course he told his story everywhere, it was repeated throughout the whole regiment; and when that regiment came under Skobelev's command, the men did not only know him, they already loved and were devoted to him.

On another occasion he was walking through the streets of Jourgievo when he saw a soldier crying.

"You old woman, what are you whining about? You should be ashamed of yourself."

The soldier drew himself up.

"Well, what is the matter? What has happened?"

No answer.

"Tell me, don't be afraid."

It appeared the poor fellow had just received a letter from home; his family were in want, the cow had died, the harvest had been bad—they were starving.

"Then why didn't you say so at once, instead of crying? Can you read and write?"

"Yes, your Excellency."

"Then here are fifty roubles,* send them home at once. They will tell you how to manage, but mind you bring me the receipt."

Skobelev never touched his pay of commander of an army-corps; it all went in charities. From all parts of Russia he received petitions without number, sometimes for help, sometimes for patronage, and sometimes for protection. All sorts and conditions of men applied to him; retired soldiers, tradespeople, peasants, and even priests. Once a peasant woman wrote to complain of her husband, who had pawned her fur jacket. Skobelev made no distinctions between trivial and important petitions, and, to his honour be it said, considered an old woman's fur jacket as important to her as the means of subsistence to an old soldier. Not a single such petition was left unattended to.

One day as he was walking along the Nicolskaya, a street in Moscow, a peasant threw himself before him.

"They tell me, General, you are he who is called Skobelev."

"I am he."

"Thank you, Sir; thank you for your goodness to me. You helped me out of great trouble. May God give you long life."

"When, my good fellow; what did I do? I don't understand."

"I wrote to you, little father, about my village

* Not quite five pounds at the present rate of exchange, but no despicable sum in Russia.

commune. They were grinding me down when an old soldier told me, 'Write,' he said, 'to Skobeleff, he will hear of it, you may be sure.' So I wrote you a letter, and you ordered the governor of our province not to touch me, so they let me alone. Oh, thank you, my little father, my defender," and the poor peasant dropped down at his feet.

Here is the secret of Skobeleff's popularity with the people of Russia, a popularity which he fully deserved. Indeed not a single letter addressed to him was left unanswered.

His determination and capacity for taking the initiative on his own responsibility were remarkable, and he admired these qualities in others. But he was much envied by his fellow-generals, who grudged him his past experience and his St. George's Cross. His friends damaged him the most. By friends those comrades in arms who really knew and loved him are not meant, but the fashionable loungers of St. Petersburg, who called themselves the friends of the young General, and, in token of friendship, repeated all manner of incredible stories about him. Some of these had joined Skobeleff, when he was carrying on military operations at Tashkent, in expectation of the St. George's Cross, and, on being disappointed, they returned circulating the most scandalous libels on their friend. One of these maintained that Skobeleff was not even a brave man.

"Why, he is a coward—a miserable coward. He is afraid of the least thing!"

I met this gentleman after the war.

"Well, your coward has turned out a hero!" I said.

“That is all owing to the imagination of the newspaper correspondents.”

“But the army, the testimony of a thousand eye-witnesses, can these not be relied on?”

“Then he must have overcome his cowardice for the sake of his ambition.”

But Geok Teppé silenced all such slanderers. Here there were no newspaper correspondents—his deeds spoke for themselves.

CHAPTER V.

SEVERAL days before the 7th (14th) June, Skobeleff was in a state of great excitement. He did not sleep for nights together. Sometimes he galloped along the river-side, sometimes he got into a boat, and, accompanied by two or three Cossacks to row him, he inspected the islands in the Danube, and once he actually crossed over to the other side and spied out what the Turks were doing as far as Rustchuk. It was useless to insist on the danger of such undertakings. Danger had an irresistible fascination for him. Without danger, without excitement, he grew bored, lost his temper, and became as captious as a woman. But as soon as work presented itself Skobeleff was another man. Having explored the Danube thoroughly, he found a new task for the night. Batteries were now being erected which had to be masked, so that the enemy should on no account be able to fire on them. Skobeleff rode out every evening to the detachments of sappers to whom this work was entrusted, and only returned from them the next morning. On one of these nocturnal visits he found

the sappers either lazy or tired ; the section of the earth-work had to be ready by the morning, but the work was progressing very slowly.

“It would be well if they would begin firing from over there,” pointing towards the Turkish side ; “we should get it done quickly then. These fellows would work with feverish rapidity.”

He had hardly finished his speech when from the opposite bank a red flaming eye seemed to open. It opened for a moment and closed its lid again. Then a distant hollow noise was heard, like the roar of cannon, and soon a grenade exploded in front of the battery with a loud metallic groan. The sappers’ spades immediately commenced working with increased diligence. “Yes, that always helps!” Skobelev remarked.

“When do you sleep ?” I once asked him.

“I can sleep for twenty-four hours together, and I can work for three days without interruption and without rest.”

Indeed, Skobelev’s wonderful constitution permitted him to perform extraordinary feats. When it was decided to guard the Danube with torpedoes, he devoted himself entirely to the work. Day and night he was to be encountered superintending the operations. He never depended on anyone, but always studied and inspected everything himself ; nothing ever escaped him, and he generally detected some defects in details of execution that had been neglected or overlooked by the officers to whom the particular work was entrusted. The day for the attack had not yet been decisively fixed before Skobelev had studied the situation so well

that the officers of the general staff listened to him in amazement. The brave attack of the torpedo-boat "Shutka," was to be covered by the 15th battalion forming part of the 4th brigade of rifles, which subsequently achieved such distinction, and gained from Skobelev the epithet of "iron." When the battalion was drawn up, the commanding officer gave the order:

"Volunteers to the front!"

The whole battalion moved forward as though by command.

"That is better," Skobelev remarked. "To my mind there should be no volunteers. Every soldier should be a candidate for distinction." The General himself seldom had recourse to this expedient. "Action should be the soldier's pleasure, his holiday. Everyone should be a volunteer."

A hundred and twenty men were chosen and placed under the command of three officers. To these were added a *sotnia* (hundred) Ural Cossacks and a field-battery. This formed a small detachment to cover the torpedo attack. The officers were on the point of proceeding with their men, when Skobelev stopped the infantry.

"Wait—you must not go off like that—the soldier should always know where he is going, and why he is going there. The soldier who knows what he has to do, and understands the purpose of his expedition, is a thousand times more valuable than an unconscious instrument. The Cossacks I have already talked to. Good morning, my lads. Do you know where you are going to?"

“To Parapan, your Excellency.”

“What for?”

“To thrash the Turks!”

“That’s right. What’s your name?”

“Egoroff, your Excellency.”

“You are a smart fellow, I see you will get the St. George’s Cross soon. Only we are not going to thrash the Turks just yet. We have another job before us just now. We want to cross the river—do you understand?”

“Yes, your Excellency.”

“Mind you do. We have got tired of sitting here among the Moldavians, where we can’t do anything without money. There is little work for soldiers here.”

“That is so, your Excellency.”

“Well, we have come here to fight—but the enemy over there won’t cross to meet us. He is too snug over there, so we must beat him out of it. Let us go, and turn him out, my eagles!”

This was met with a cheer.

“But to turn him out we must first cross the river, that is where we shall catch it. As soon as we begin to cross over, the Turk, who is no fool either, will set his monitors at our positions and flotillas. You have seen how those monitors can puff and blow?”

“Yes, your Excellency.”

“He will try to drown us. But we are more cunning. We are going to put such mines in the river that he will be unable to pass them. As soon as he gets on to one of those mines they will explode and

blow him up. We mean to cross the river under his very nose."

Another cheer greeted him at the end of this speech.

"He is quite different from the others," they said among themselves afterwards. "That is a clever general, and intelligible." And from that time Skobelev received the nick-name of the "intelligible" general.

Parapan is a village about ten or twelve miles from Jourgievo. Its gardens extend almost to the river, the house of the squire is situated on a rising ground, and was occupied by Skobelev's staff on the 7th of June. The night was clear, warm, such a night as is only known to the fortunate south with its metallic twilight, its waves of perfume carried on the wind, with its gently rustling trees and amorously twinkling stars. The moon shone brightly, shedding its pale light over the gardens, and spreading its rays over the Danube like silver nets. They did not look like the reflections of the moon on the waters to the northern eye, but seemed rather to float to the surface like the silver nets of some fabulous fisherman renowned in fairy tales. The breakers could be heard sleepily beating against the sand-banks. The opposite bank seemed like an enchanted country, prohibited, inaccessible. In the poetic silence of that night the regular splash of the oars of eight boats was scarcely audible. These boats, however, contained some fifty rifles, and about thirty Cossacks, who were being taken to the island of Metchik, which had been thoroughly explored by Skobelev the night before.

"They will be seen by the enemy!" Skobelev exclaimed anxiously, as the boats appeared in the bright

moonlight on the water, their inmates looking like silhouettes cut out of agate. But on that enchanted "other side" everything was quiet and calm, and the words of command given in an undertone died in the warm air of the southern night. The island was flooded. Skobelevff ordered the boats to be fastened to chestnut-trees, on the branches of which, and on patches of dry land, the soldiers and Cossacks, taking off their boots, perched like water-fowl. The strictest silence prevailed. Those taking part in the expedition could only hear the rustling of branches and the gentle movement of leaves. From the Russian bank the island looked completely empty, not a man could be descried. In the meantime eight small steamers were approaching, of which three were torpedo-boats. They encountered nothing but shoals on their way, and did not arrive till four o'clock in the morning, at day-break, when they had been expected at two. In the indistinct light of the early morn, Skobelevff could scarcely distinguish what the Turks were doing, or make out their hazy outlines. Everything seemed to dance from the dazzling brilliancy of the rising sun, as though a bright glowing fog hung over that green beautiful country.

"Now it will soon begin," Skobelevff said at last.

"What will begin?"

"We have been discovered."

It soon became evident that the General's searching eye had really been able to distinguish a detachment of the enemy, which had galloped up to the river-side.

"Ah! They are puffing away now," Skobelevff remarked with a smile, as the enemy opened fire on the

boats, which had already commenced sinking their torpedoes.

"Fine fellows! Look there! They are working up to the very banks! I always loved sailors!"

Indeed, the fellows were working under the very noses of the Turks. One could hear the sharp rattle of musketry increasing and increasing in volume. There was reason to fear great losses.

"Now our turn has come!" and, without waiting for his father's orders, young Skobeleff, officially only the chief of his father's staff, but as a matter of fact the real commander of the division, ordered the batteries on our banks to open fire. The distance was great, but the guns were successful; and the Turks, of whom about two hundred had marched up, were entirely dispersed.

It was not till an hour later that a Turkish man-of-war made her appearance. She was saluted with a volley from our guns. The return fire did not reach us. Their first shot fell about a mile away from us, and the second exploded almost at the mouth of the gun from which it had been discharged. One of these shots evidently injured the boat; and she began to retire. Once she stopped; but two of our barges, armed with torpedoes, approached her. The enormous steamer awaited them till they were within about two hundred yards, when she turned and fled. At that moment we could see a monitor, which had until then been hidden from view, approaching us; in fact she already began to fire. The commander of the torpedo-boat, "Shutka," now came up to Novikoff, the officer in

charge of the defensive works, who was known amongst the sailors of the Danubian flotilla by the sobriquet of "grandfather," and asked him :

"May I attack the enemy?"

Novikoff was deservedly popular, and much liked by Skobelev ; in reply he blew the officer a kiss.

"Give him a bite," shouted Skobelev. "The dog is small," he added, "but its teeth are sharp. Catch hold of his tail!"

I will not describe the remarkable attack of that little torpedo-boat, that small dog with sharp teeth. But when the disabled "Shutka," with her wounded commander, retired before the monitor, this latter, seized with a sudden panic, sailed away. Only at three o'clock in the afternoon did she again venture to approach the defensive works. At the same time small clouds of smoke could be seen rising from batteries on the Turkish side of the river, which had been rapidly concentrated from Rustchuk. The monitor proved very discreet. Skobelev received her with a well-directed fire from our guns, and she instantly retired out of their range. But the enemy's rifles, on the other hand, kept pouring a very destructive fire on us from behind trees and bushes, and succeeded in seriously injuring three of our barges.

"They will take them!" Skobelev exclaimed, and without further ado plunged his horse into the Danube and commenced swimming across. Boats were immediately sent out after him, into one of which he succeeded in getting. The boats rowed up in the face of the enemy's fire, and succeeded in rescuing two boats

with torpedoes, one of which, riddled with holes, they dragged across a sand-bank, the bullets hailing on them all the time. One soldier made a somersault whilst ducking down before a bullet.

“Ah! met a friend? Well, give it another farewell bow, you will never meet with it again, comrade. It is disgraceful to bow the head before a Turkish bullet. Look, this is the way to stand under fire!”

And while the others were dragging the boats along, Skobelev kept standing in the most exposed and dangerous position, towards which the bullets from the enemy's side seemed to be particularly directed. The bullets buried themselves in the earth at his feet, others blew down the leaves of trees over his head; but Skobelev remained immovable.

“What did you do that for?” he was asked.

“The boats had to be rescued,” he replied; “the soldiers would have been in too great a hurry and would have done nothing. But when they saw the General standing in front of them, they found it easier to work. It was not so dreadful. What could they be afraid of when I was not afraid? An example is necessary everywhere.”

“Well, and supposing you had been killed, and in such a small and insignificant affair?”

“I am not accustomed to divide things into significant and insignificant. Everything that I undertake is important to me. And if the soldiers see that our generals take care of their skins, they will become shy of exposing theirs also.”

CHAPTER VI.

A FEW days later the General made his celebrated attempts at swimming across the Danube on horse-back.

"Is it possible that you are not afraid?" a young man in the diplomatic service asked him.

"You see, my dear sir, you have the *right* to be a coward ; a soldier *may* be a coward, a subaltern may be excused for possessing the instinct of self-preservation ; but cowardice in a commanding officer, from a captain upwards, is indefensible. A coward general is in my opinion a contradiction in terms ; and the fewer of such contradictions in terms we tolerate the better. I don't expect everyone to be madly brave, that he should be roused to enthusiasm at the sound of musketry. That is stupid. I only want everyone to do his duty in action."

The disciples of routine in the army, and the bright galaxy of parade geniuses and wiseacres of the study, could not reconcile themselves to the handsome, manly General. When he stood under fire in his white uniform, mounted on his white charger, when he

seemed to be challenging death to do its worst, finding his greatest pleasure in this continual contempt of danger, in his feeling of being a man, a thinker in the exercise of self-control in the midst of a hell, in the destructive whirlwind of the orgy we call war—when he appeared to be inviting the enemy's fire—he was reproached for swaggering, for posing before the world and parading his recklessness. These gentlemen did not perceive that it was much better to parade one's valour and swagger, than to go about wearing the uniform and loudly repeating phrases like the following: "I can admire valour but do not understand it. Let others die, but I am your humble servant; daring and folly go hand-in-hand." It was much better to set an example of self-denial to his soldiers and subordinate officers, and show that the general commanding a division, as much as the officer to whom only a company is confided, should first of all forget himself. The very æstheticism of this daring, if we may so express ourselves, the art of being elegant in action, produced a much deeper impression on surroundings than the quiet and unpretentious valour which is the characteristic of us Russians. And when Skobelev appeared thus under fire, already at the commencement of the war, always to the front, always gay and jolly, arrayed for the occasion, inspired, resplendent, the old hens clucked: "Why all that posing? What is the use of it? He only wants to show that he did not get his crosses from the Dressing-gowns for nothing."

But in the meantime the more simple-minded and

the more clear-sighted part of the army (soldiers and children never make mistakes) treated the disgraced hero very differently. They accorded him his due, and recognised in the young eagle, only just trying his powerful wings, the future genius and leader. One evening, as I was walking through the camp at Jourgievo with him, we passed a tent from which the sound of voices issued. All at once we distinctly heard Skobelev's name mentioned.

"Stop," he said, "it is very interesting to know what the soldiers say of me."

"But if they should be abusing you?"

"All the better, that would be a good lesson. Soldiers are very clear-sighted with all their simplicity. They are the most impartial and pitiless judges! Notwithstanding that, these judges are kept well in hand."

"Yes, and even whipped."

"But not under me!" he replied hotly; "I would rather shoot a man than flog him. No, there is nothing more degrading."

Meanwhile the conversation in the tent had really turned on generals.

"No, comrade, Skobelev is thorough. He is a Russian born and bred. He is a regular fighting cock."

"A fighting cock! What a comparison!"

"Of course, no bird is braver than a fighting-cock. Have you seen them fight, comrade? They are wonderfully smart, and they are great dandies. A cock is afraid of nobody, that is why he struts about so. The cock is watchful, he guards the light!"

"But what do you say to ours?" asked one of the soldiers, mentioning at the same time his general's name.

"He's a bag-pipe."

"A what?"

"A bag-pipe. Let anybody who likes take him and blow on him from one end, he will begin to speak at the other. A regular bag-pipe. But that one is a cock. Cocks like the day; as soon as he sees it dawn he crows and wakes everyone."

On another occasion, late at night, we overheard a soldier quarrelling with a Jewish purveyor of spirits.

"You think you can do as you like, you stupid fellow," said the soldier, "but we'll go and tell Skobelev?"

"And what do I care for your Skobelev?"

"He will have you shot, to teach you not to cheat soldiers of the orthodox faith."

"Bah! I spit on your Skobelev," the Jew replied, in a rage.

"What! spit! You infamous cur! Do you know who Skobelev is?"

And the battle commenced. From words the soldiers proceeded to gesticulations, and soon the Jew's yells were distinctly audible, as well as the sound of blows showered on him.

"No, my fellow, we won't have Skobelev abused. He looks after us and takes care of us, and we won't hear him insulted," and they all redoubled the vigour of their blows.

Of course, Skobelev did not praise his men for such violence, and in this instance, as in all others, showed his hatred of all lawlessness.

Speaking of Skobelev's relations to his men, I must not omit to mention the trouble he took to develop their self-respect. I shall never forget how he once reprimanded one of his favourite colonels who was beating a soldier.

"I must request you," he said, "to refrain from such behaviour while you are serving under me. I will at present content myself with a severe reprimand; if, however, I have occasion to find fault with you on this subject again I shall take other measures."

The colonel, in defence, pleaded the necessity of maintaining discipline, the stupidity of his men, and the wholesome effects of a little cuffing.

"Discipline should be iron. There can be no doubt about that, but that is established by the moral authority of the commanding officer, not by means of his fist. I am ashamed of you, Colonel! The soldier's pride is to defend his country, and you, Sir, thrash that defender like a footman! Why, at the present day, even footmen are flogged no longer. As to the stupidity of the men, you must know them very badly. I owe a great deal to the common sense of our soldiers. But one must know how to profit by it."

When Skobelev was made general of division he dismissed one of his colonels simply because this officer began cultivating his men's teeth in the interests of discipline.

"I do not want such fellows," he exclaimed, "you

may join the staff and thrash the clerks there. My fighting regiments are not used to such treatment."

He certainly succeeded in raising the spirit of his men. After Plevna one of his men was to be flogged for something; he appealed directly to the General.

"What is the matter?"

"I have come to your Excellency. Colonel wants to have me flogged."

"Well?"

"I have come to entreat your Excellency's mercy, and to beg to be allowed a court-martial."

"What have you done?"

The man confessed his misdemeanour.

"A court-martial would condemn you to death."

"We are all in God's hands. Every day of our lives we are under fire here. I don't mind being shot; but if I am to be disgraced, your Excellency, I shall commit suicide. May I have a court-martial?"

"Those are the sort of men for me!" Skobelev exclaimed exultingly afterwards. "They are not afraid of death, but dread disgrace."

His army corps is still remarkable for its spirit. In time of peace he raised the soldiers' self-respect even higher. He was in the habit of conversing with his men as their comrade, but there was scarcely anywhere a corps where the power of the officers was greater or the discipline more severe than in Skobelev's. He was not one of those generals who like their men when they are at a comfortable distance and cheer. The dandified, spoilt, and fastidious Skobelev could live the same life as his soldiers, share their discomforts, their squalor,

and their privations in the trenches, and so easily that they were not even astonished at it. They used to say: "His ancestor tilled the ground, and has left his trace on him. He understands us. The others are fine gentlemen, they cannot understand us, they cannot even speak as we do."

A comrade and good fellow in the intervals of bivouac relaxation, he was severe and exacting to the extreme in action. Here he would have no excuses. He made no distinction between his own friends and strangers, or rather, he sent his own friends in advance, appointed them to the most difficult tasks, the hardest privations.

"He who would go with me must be prepared for anything."

It was wondered at that he should make a friend of every officer under him. But then the ensign who drank with him as a comrade the night before would be expected to lay down his life the following day, an example to his men. Skobelev's friendship meant responsibility and increased danger, not exemption therefrom. The friend of Skobelev was expected to follow his own example. Where a stranger might be excused or pardoned, there was no mercy, no justification, for a friend.

CHAPTER VII.

SKOBELEFF's energy was wonderful. He combined with it to a surprising degree the power of initiative. When not fighting he was making plans and projects. It was quite impossible to say when he rested and slept. Having galloped over some seventy miles on horseback, frequently changing horses, he would immediately on his return receive reports from his aides-de-camp, give ever so many orders, requiring shrewdness and clearness of mind ; and then go into the camp to see what dinner his soldiers were having, inspect the outposts and sentries at the same time, and then return to study a book, or to enter into a discussion on some subject demanding concentration and vigour, with the officers of his staff. In these discussions he displayed the most varied and solid reading. He could call up a whole arsenal of historical facts, statistics, dates, names, and literature in support of his theory. When such serious discussions were not possible, he would address himself to the young officers under his command, and instruct them in the art of war. But his was no

dry-as-dust intellect immersed in his own narrow affairs. Even in instruction his liveliness did not desert him. All Skobelev's friends must remember those delightful dinners he gave his comrades in arms, at which he opened out his soul to them, and allowed his versatility full play. On those occasions he would discuss every variety of subject ; serious questions seriously, humorous ones amusingly, give a joke and take a joke, tell droll stories, make clever epigrams, and give countless evidences of his powers of observation. One thing he was always an enemy of, and that was sentimentality. He could not bear it, and laughed at people "infected " with it. When one of the guests at his table happened to be a pheasant (military dandies in the subordinate ranks, always in new uniforms, and disciples of "free thought," were thus nicknamed), Skobelev would draw him out with much finesse and refinement of humour. In spite of himself the bear would begin to dance and show off his tricks, to the delight of his audience. When such a dinner took place on the field or in the trenches, the poor pheasant had a dessert in store for him which he probably did not always relish.

"You would like to reconnoitre the enemy's position?" the General would suggest in his softest and most insinuating accents; or else he would politely remark: "I think you take an interest in the Turkish works?"

The incautious pheasant, smiling blissfully, would reply in the affirmative.

"He will be dropped into an ice-pail immediately,"

the aides-de-camp would whisper to each other. Indeed, Skobelev would here take his arm and lead him out into the open plain between the Russian and Turkish works across which bullets were continually flying.

"What is that?—those appear to be bullets," the unfortunate pheasant would murmur. "How they whistle. Why, one can easily get shot here."

"Yes," would be Skobelev's cold-blooded reply whilst leading his guest slowly along the heavenly road, so called because travellers on it had every chance of getting to heaven more rapidly than they might otherwise expect. The reader can imagine the young officer's feelings! If the latter went through the ordeal well, Skobelev made his peace with him and became his friend. But the pheasants, notwithstanding their stupidity and vanity, soon learned to be cautious; and did not trust themselves near Skobelev when he was in the trenches or on the field.

With every fresh exploit of his the hatred of the Staff towards him grew. But it was his former comrades who envied him more especially. They could not digest his rapid success, his extraordinary luck in battle. They were still captains and colonels whilst he had already made himself a brilliant career and left them far behind him. When it was possible to question his courage, the least important of his many great qualities, they did so. They even told stories of the most astounding cowardice which they said he had shown on occasions. When it became no longer possible to spread such reports without being accused of lying,

they began to attribute his personal bravery to his love of display and posing, and maintained that he possessed no other single military talent. When even this could no longer be advanced with safety, they accused him of indifference to the lives of his men. "He will send ten thousand men to certain death just for the sake of effect. He only thinks of his own career!" Legends were circulated of how he refused aid to such an one, and how he purposely arrived late, so as to finish the action himself alone; how he rejoiced over the failures of others. The correspondents of English, American, French, Italian, and Russian newspapers gave him his due. McGahan, Forbes, Brackenbury, Carrick, Havelock, Grant—all sent the most enthusiastic accounts of him to their papers. But what did that signify? They had been bribed! And when the military representatives of friendly powers with the army, seeing Skobelev in action, spoke of him as of a future military genius, an explanation was found even for that. These gentlemen, it appeared, wanted Skobelev to recommend them for certain decorations. It is wonderful, however, that these foreign officers, thirsting as they did for orders, did not praise those leaders who covered them with every possible cross and decoration. During the expedition to Akhal Tekke, Skobelev's enemies maliciously spread the report that he was a prisoner, and his army completely defeated. They did not hold their peace till the brilliant termination of that expedition forced them to do so. And when his cold corpse was stretched out on the bier, these gentlemen had the assurance to call themselves his friends!

“ I feel his loss particularly. The late General loved me so ! ”

“ We were the most familiar friends. I alone understand how great his loss is to the country ! ”

“ I am burying my dearest friend ! ”

These were some of their phrases. What a sarcastic smile would have played on those cold and bloodless lips, had they not lost the power to laugh ; what scorn would have flashed in those eyes could he have heard those insincerities poured out over his proud skull, beautiful even in death.

Side by side with utterances of this kind, they would, as though in compassion, make the following biting remarks :

“ Is this the sort of death for him ? He should have fallen in battle—in front of his legions.”

“ What signifies the mode of death ? What he did when he lived ; that is of importance. But as for how he died—is it not all the same ? Our regrets will not bring him to life again.”

After the Akhal Tekke expedition it was no longer prudent to talk about Skobelev's incapacity, for it was difficult to find credulous listeners ; besides, such reports cast a compromising shadow on their authors. It therefore became necessary to have recourse to other methods for lowering Skobelev in the public esteem. Then it was discovered that, like Cæsar, Skobelev was ambitious.

“ His mouth is now so widely opened,” they said, “ that it will be difficult to find a morsel large enough to satisfy his voracity.”

Others ascribed to him schemes of universal dominion, Taking a leaf out of the German newspapers, they pointed at him, the most faithful servant of Russia, as a future Napoleon. One folly succeeded another and was spread about in society, which is accustomed to learn everything by hear-say, to believe rumours and scandal, and unable to distinguish between slander and truth.

When the late Emperor in reward for taking Akhal Tekke made him a full general and gave him the St. George of the second grade, Skobelev became quite melancholy, and this melancholy did not leave him when he returned to Russia.

"They will eat me up now," he said. "I have too many friends round me. It is a bad sign. Enemies are better. Those you know, and can guess their every move. But it is not so easy to manage one's friends."

Skobelev undoubtedly had great failings, most great characters have great faults ; but these faults disappeared when he applied himself to his work. Spoilt, fitful as a child, proudly conscious of his own excellencies, he could make himself so pleasant to those who surrounded him that they simply fell in love with that warrior soul. The best court is that of subordinates ; it is the most impartial and the most just. Subordinates alone are able faithfully and truly to define a character, for they are continually brought in contact with and rubbed against it. From them you cannot hide your faults ; them you cannot deceive. And these judges pronounced in favour of Skobelev. They could

distinguish between the irritability of a man—on whom was reposed the weight of responsibility, whose brain worked for all—and coldness of heart or cruelty. They even forgave Skobelev an injustice; for they knew that he himself would be the first to repent of it and confess it. They did not envy his favourites, knowing well that to be near Skobelev meant hard work and exceptional dangers. Those who thought to gain his confidence and creep into his favour for their own mean and selfish ends made a great mistake. He saw through and through them and knew perfectly well how to use them for his own purposes. A man of his education and social standing might tolerate buffoons, but these buffoons had no influence over him, quite the contrary.

“He is not to be cheated. He will lead others by the nose,” used to be said of him.

“He sees through you. Whilst you are only thinking of something he has already got hold of you, and won’t let you go,” the soldiers rudely but pointedly expressed his penetration.

A man who was useful to him or his division he forgave everything, but in revenge he used him to the full. In this matter the General was not over scrupulous.

“Every good-for-nothing may at some time or other prove useful. Good-for-nothings should be treated with respect, and should not be allowed too much liberty, but when the moment comes, let them loose and use them to the full. And then, when they become dangerous, throw them overboard, and let them wallow

in their own infamy, so long as they have accomplished their work."

This theory might be somewhat Jesuitical, but in time of war every kind of service must be reckoned with. The spy is in time of peace despicable, it is difficult to find a meaner occupation; but, nevertheless, he is sometimes used by Governments, however reluctantly. In time of war spies are indispensable.

"He is a mean beast—but useful!" Skobelev would say; and though he never entered into direct communication with these gentlemen, he was always fully informed of the enemy's movements, the circumstances of his position, and where he would operate.

"In time of peace, when no danger threatened my soldiers, I would throw this scamp away, but during war he is of use!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SKOBELEFF's power of using people was astounding.

One day a Roumanian officer arrived at his quarters, a thorough Bukharest dandy in every respect. He had diamond ear-rings, an umbrella to protect him from the sun, his waist was enclosed in stays, his cheeks—were rouged! He wore a brilliant uniform and jingling spurs. But his face plainly reflected the indescribable baseness and stupidity of his mind. He proved to be a sprig of an ancient noble family, who bore a ham on their shield because their ancestor had been a man of commercial enterprise and sold pigs, and, in reward of his successful operations in the pig-market, had been created a noble of Roumania. This dandy scraped and bowed before Skobeleff unceasingly. He wore an enormous Stanislaus cross hanging from his neck, so large it looked like those which are worn at the side, and attached to a ribbon across the body. It was more like a holy image than an order.

"I ordered it like that myself," he said, "after my own drawings. Yours is hardly visible."

His appearance was so imposing that the soldiers took him for Prince Charles of Roumania at least.

That Skobelev should receive such an effeminate milksop caused much astonishment. It turned out, however, that this dandy had lived in Bulgaria, and gave the General a variety of the most valuable information about the country. Besides, this corsetted and rouged representative of Roumanian nobility proved most useful. He furnished everything, even to the soldiers. He supplied boots from Roumania, and various articles of a similar character. At Plevna he even distinguished himself, probably feeling the honour and reputation of his pork-butcher's ancestor at stake; he evinced a most astounding bravery, and went wherever Skobelev sent him.

"There, comrades! What a smart chap that Roumanian is! Do not let him out-distance us!" Skobelev would tell his men. And these would throw themselves on the enemy with all the more energy, determined not to leave the honour of first coming up with him to the Roumanian.

Skobelev had under him at the commencement of the campaign an insignificant general, now gathered to his fathers. A Falstaff to his men, he was a proverb among them. Although a coward by nature, and mortally afraid of losing his life, he loved to brag of his bravery and deeds of daring.

"I and Skobelev. Skobelev and I together," were the expressions continually in his mouth.

"Do you know," he would say to his aide-de-camp, "Skobelev is my only dangerous rival. Who do you think, now, is braver, I or Skobelev?"

If his aide-de-camp had dined, and did not wish to dine again, he would reply: "Why, Skobelev, of course!"

"Will you be good enough to return to quarters and see whether all the documents and letters are ready."

Whereupon the aide-de-camp would go to quarters to sleep. If, on the other hand, he was hungry, or Falstaff had something specially nice for dinner, the answer would be of a very different kind: "You know, your Excellency, that is a very difficult question. Skobelev is too foolhardy; but you are quite different—you——"

"I say, young man, have you dined?"

"No, not yet. Skobelev throws himself too much in advance—whereas you——"

"Well, look here, remain and dine with me to-day. Well, and what about me; do not be confused, speak out. You know, I like to hear the truth about myself."

"You are in every respect—a leader!"

"John,—open a bottle of claret. The claret I brought from Bukharest. Yes; then I am a leader, you say?"

"Yes. You are afraid of nothing. In the midst of death and devastation you calmly give your instructions and direct the issue of the battle."

"John, put a bottle of champagne in ice for us for the end of our dinner."

Of course such substantial rewards had the effect of increasing the aide-de-camp's eloquence and sincerity.

Once this Falstaff described himself as follows :

"I was standing under fire. Grenades fell here and there, in front of me and behind me, to the right of me and to the left of me. They fell and exploded. But I was so rapt in contemplation, admiring the picture of the battle" (in a gentle pathetic voice), "that I forgot all about myself. At that moment Skobelevf rode past. The General turned on me: 'You astound me,' he said. 'Are you really not afraid? *I* feel uncomfortable.' Just then a grenade exploded under my very nose" (what a nose it was!), "I pointed towards it: 'That is my answer,' I said to him."

"And what did Skobelevf say?"

"He silently grasped my hand, sighed, and rode off."

Of course this story found its way to Skobelevf's ears, who laughed heartily at it; but became much more attentive to Falstaff.

"At the very next battle I'll pay the old sinner out for his braggadocio."

"We understand each other, General, do we not?" Skobelevf said to him one day.

Falstaff was beside himself with joy.

"We are fighting men," Skobelevf continued, "there need be no jealousy between us; indeed, it is for me to envy you."

At the very next action Skobelevf ordered the unfortunate Falstaff to lead his troops up to a redoubt and take it.

"Show the men how we fight. Take my place."

Falstaff really fought very well, and provoked Skobeleff to remark to his staff, "Rivalry begets heroes."

"Well, how did you get on?" he exclaimed to the returning lion.

"I am satisfied with myself to-day," Falstaff replied grandiloquently.

"That is your best reward," was Skobeleff's feeling answer. He did not, however, recommend him for promotion or decoration.

"I may say that I have seen hell."

"And hell has seen you."

The old General could not stand it any longer, he burst into tears and embraced Skobeleff.

Another of Skobeleff's officers was also very brave by his own accounts, but as soon as an action was expected he used to send all manner of good things to the General's kitchen.

"B—— has sent you some sucking pigs."

"And with them a doctor's certificate of ill-health?" Skobeleff would ask with malicious concern.

"Yes, your Excellency."

"Tell him he need not march out to-morrow."

Quod erat demonstrandum.

"B—— desires to present his compliments, and sends you a couple of geese and a turkey."

"Poor fellow! what is the matter with him?"

"What, the turkey, Sir?"

"No, I mean the General."

"He is quite well, your Excellency."

“Ah! Well then he will get ill towards the evening.”

And sure enough in the evening an orderly came to report B——’s sudden indisposition.

“That man has a wonderful military experience. There is no cheating him. He always knows when an action is going to be fought in time to get ill beforehand. He seems to smell it.”

“What is the use of such officers?”

“He is an invaluable caterer. I have confided the commissariat department entirely to him, and have done very well. See how well he conducts it! Splendidly! And he takes pains about it. If he were not subject to these sudden attacks of indisposition, you may be sure the soldiers would not be so well fed. Let him get ill. Peace be unto him.”

Another, a major—the beau ideal of a major of the line, with a tremendous paunch, and always in a state of perspiration as though he were stewing in his own soup—had the cross of St. George, but was careful to conceal it and never once put it on.

“Why don’t you wear it?” he was asked.

“Well, you see, I am in the commissariat department; but if I should hang out my St. George, oh dear! you know Skobelev’s greed for knights of St. George, he would send me to the front at once. I am getting on in life, and have no ambition that way, thank you very much.”

And who would believe that this coward was a favourite of Skobelev’s? Such was the case, however; for the major possessed the talent of providing plenty

in the wilderness, and feeding the troops in a country exhausted and impoverished by war. When apparently not a piece of straw could be obtained, the "gallant major" would find forage in astounding quantities.

"This evening we are going to have a little piff-paffing," Skobeleff said to him one day, smiling. "Now, Major, there's a chance for you to get the Vladimir order with the sword."

"Yes," the major replied uneasily, whilst the perspiration rolled down his cheeks more freely than usual; "but the Cossacks have no hay, and the Souzdal Regiment's bread is——"

"Well?"

"And I have discovered a place where ——"

"Then start off at once and get what you can."

The conversation thus ended to their mutual satisfaction. The major was spared the detestable piff-paffing, whilst the soldiers of the Souzdal Regiment and the Cossack horses were both well fed.

CHAPTER IX.

SKOBELEFF delighted in war as a specialist delights in his work. He was called "the poet of the sword." Rather a high-flown title ; but that he was the poet of war, its enthusiast, there can be no doubt. He understood all its evil and the terrible results it produced. He loved the Russian people dearly, and frequently spoke of the peasant as oppressed, uneducated, neglected and entitled to pity ; and he regarded war as a sad necessity. On this subject the military man had to be separated from the thinker. In the latter capacity he frequently assured us that a war should never be undertaken except with honourable intentions, and in such cases only where any other method of escaping from a dangerous situation, either economical or political, was impossible. "War," he would say, "is pardonable only in self-defence ; when there is no room to breathe, or when the national soul yearns to make its way out of darkness into the light of day." But once a soldier, and regarding his subject from a professional point of view, he gave himself up to its study with a devotion bordering on fanaticism. Perhaps few even of the

German generals of our day knew their subject so well and had studied it so thoroughly as had Skobelev. He was indeed capable of becoming a shield to Russia, and in her hour of trial he could have guarded her and led her against her enemies, conquering and to conquer, loving war as he did, not with pharisaical regrets and sentimental justification on his lips, but enthusiastically and gloriously. On the other hand no one knew so well as he what the price of a war was.

“It is a terrible thing,” he used to say, “to commence a war light-heartedly and thoughtlessly without being absolutely forced to do so. No flightiness in such matters is pardonable. Wars undertaken from motives of ambition, dynastic interest, or savagery, sully the reigns of kings and emperors like indelible black blotches. But it is still more dreadful when the nation, which has spent its strength and life-blood in humouring the caprices of its rulers, suffers by the undertaking, and these rulers are either too weak or too spiritless to profit by the energy of their people, by whose valour they have succeeded in overthrowing the enemy. It is useless in such cases to be generous to the vanquished. That is being generous at the expense of others. Such generosity the signers of the treaties of peace have not to pay for ; it is furnished at the cost of a hundred thousand sacrifices, economic and otherwise, of the people. When war has once commenced it is absurd to talk of humanity. War and humanity have nothing in common with each other. Nations go to war when all other means of settlement have proved useless. Enemies must here stand face to

face, and good-nature is out of place. Each man must feel that he must kill his opponent or be killed by him. Individuals may, perhaps, give way to a generous impulse and allow themselves to be killed. But the army has a nation behind it, and its leader has no right to spare the enemy as long as he is still dangerous. The theories of civilians are out of place. If the moment for annihilating the enemy be allowed to slip by, the next moment may bring our own annihilation with it; consequently there is no time for doubts and irresolution. Irresolute men should not put on the uniform. Indeed, there is nothing more hurtful than want of resolution; nay, no one can be more cruel than weak-minded sentimental people. The man who loves his neighbour, the man who hates war, should destroy the enemy entirely, so that one war may not be followed by another."

"In that case, a declaration of war is only justifiable when the enemy has invaded the country."

"Oh no! every country has the right to grow to a certain magnitude; the principle of nationality stands first. An empire should grow until it obtains what we call natural boundaries. We Slavs (for if we confine ourselves within the narrow limits of the Russian tribe we lose all our importance, all our historical *raison d'être*; I therefore repeat, we Slavs) must have the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles as a natural outlet into the sea; or else, notwithstanding our immense extent of territory, if we have not these important channels, we shall choke. In this matter, for instance, we should for ever put an end to all sentimentality, and remember

nothing but our own interests. First our own—and then we may think of those of others. Napoleon the Great understood this perfectly. He knew what he was about when he showed his cards to Alexander I. At Erfurt and Tilsit he proposed to re-arrange the boundaries of Europe.”

“Yes, to commence a war which would have caused rivers of blood to flow.”

“And did it not run in oceans afterwards? He proposed to give us the whole of European Turkey, Moldavia and Wallachia, the blessed Slavonic south, on condition only that we should not interfere between him and England and Germany. What friends of ours! It was as if I proposed to destroy your worst enemies, and had, into the bargain, in consideration of your permission to do so, overwhelmed you with presents. And what did we do? At first we understood it all plainly; but after a time we commenced playing at sincerity and talked of the binding nature of platonic treaties, and fraternised with the Germans! Well, and a nice mess we are in. Oceans of blood have been shed, and will yet be shed before we get settled. We then saved the Germans. That may be very touching from the point of view of a sentimental German novelist; but we have paid for it with enormous historical misfortunes. It was owing to that mistake that we had the Germans and English on our shoulders during the last war, and got into the Gordian knot of the Berlin Treaty, and that the Eastern question has remained undecided, which will yet require the shedding of much Russian blood. That is what we have gained

by diplomatic sentimentality. I do not believe in friendly alliances between nations. That kind of friendship is seldom based on equality. In such alliances we shall generally find that one of the parties reaps all the benefits, and the other pays the piper; one eats all the chestnuts, and the other pulls them out of the fire with bare hands; one sheds its blood and spends money, the other is an honest broker and is not averse to cheat its friends at the favourable moment. If we must have treaties, then, let some other country be victimised, and not ours. Let others shed their blood and spend their money for us; let the chestnuts be pulled out of the fire by others for us to eat. Or, best of all, let us act alone. My hut stands by itself, I know of nothing until I am touched; but, once touched, I will gain my object."

Skobeleff always looked at war from the economical point of view. There could be only two direct causes of war. In one case a comparatively highly civilized nation attacks a weaker but still a cultivated nation, and overcomes it, with a view to increasing its own wealth and to appropriating part of its territory. Thus, for instance, India and America were conquered. In the other case a poorer nation attacks a higher civilization, and utilizes the fruits of it for the improvement of its own condition. Such were the conquests of the Hunns and Vandals, the Teutons, Tartars, &c. War was only a manifestation of the law of the struggle for existence. His views on the conquest of Poland he expressed as follows :

"The conquest of Poland was caused by considera-

tions which may be judged from various points of view. But as to its partition, I loudly proclaim it was a fractricide, a historical crime. The Russian nation, it is true, is innocent in this respect; it was not the Russian nation which committed the crime, and it is not responsible for it. But in all our history there is no more hideous passage than that partition of Poland between ourselves and the Germans. It was a Benjamin being sold by his brothers into captivity. Long will the Russians have to blush for this melancholy page in their history."

When Skobelev expressed his opinion he spoke up bravely, without hedging behind phrases or making excuses. He was not afraid of having his views developed to their very extremest application, so long as this was done logically. What made his opinions so valuable was that he put them forth openly and honestly, caring but little for the reception they might receive at the moment from society or the authorities. Therein lay his strength and his importance; he was as a standard amongst the people. With his death they have lost their flag and their leader.

The perfect impossibility of making war at the present time was often pointed out to him. But he would answer every objection with masterly logic.

"You ask me how we are to fight without money? how we are to fight when the rouble is worth 62 copecks instead of 100? I don't understand finances, but I feel that our German financiers must be leading us by the nose. In 1793 the finances of France were in an even more desperate condition than ours. The metal franc

was worth 100 paper francs; nevertheless Napoleon, who had neither boots, nor clothes, nor food for his soldiers, marched against the enemy, and not only got boots, clothes, and food for his men, but enriched the French treasury and restored the franc to its normal value. Under Peter the Great we were so poor that when we had no guns left us, after the Battle of Narva, we were obliged to melt our church bells. But it did not matter! After Poltava everything was changed; and from thenceforth Russia became a great power. And the conquest of Russia by the Tartars! Do you suppose they conquered us because their rate of exchange was very high? No; they simply had nothing to eat, so they went and conquered Russia; and to conquer Russia is no joke. I don't say we ought to fight now, while our rouble is at 62 copecks, we can wait. But the Germans will not make us wait long; they will send the rouble lower. Then it will be time! Besides, I do not understand what we want money to make war with for. In our country the paper rouble has the value of a rouble. We believe in the security of our State institutions; then let them write money on leather if they like, we trust them, and in matters of credit that is all that is wanted. If it should please God to let us carry the war into the enemy's country, the enemy should take it as an honour if we pay him with our paper money. Even paper money I part with with a broken heart. The enemy should feed us for nothing. As it is, our people are needy in comparison with their neighbours, and I must pay money into the bargain which has been earned with pain and sorrow and hard

labour by our peasants. I cannot understand such sentimentality. Lawyers maintain that victors should be generous towards the conquered foe, and should pay for everything that their hungry soldiers may take. The creators of the Berlin Treaty would have gone further, and were prepared to make Russia pay a contribution, only just to show Europe how generous we are! Good God! when I think of it I could cry! They made our poor peasant pay for the expenses of the war, the poor peasant who is suffering from bad harvests as it is, and from the diving tendencies of the bureaucratic fist."

During the Tekke campaign Skobelev put his theory into practice. Until his appointment to the command of the expedition all payments for provisions for the army were made in gold and silver. But on the third day of his arrival Skobelev ordered all Persian coins in Russian possession to be changed for Russian paper-money; and not to accept Persian coins in Government transactions, but to demand Russian notes of the Persians. Until his arrival a third of the officers' pay was made in gold; he ordered them to be paid entirely in notes, though, of course, he raised their pay proportionally. At last the Persians and Turkomans entreated us as a favour to accept Persian silver rouble for rouble, though they had but recently given no more than 70 copecks for our paper notes.

"The French and German exchanges may well regard war as an economic heresy," Skobelev said, "while their money is at par, while they are all well fed, while they have plenty of work and education is progressing.

But when we have to be contented with unwinnowed bread, to sigh over our unpaid debts, and when we have to choose between starvation and death at the hands of the enemy, the Russian people prefer war if only for the reason that they consider death in the field the more honourable of the two. Besides, there is always the hope of victory! Of course there are, and always will be, well-fed peaceful people, whose means of life are guaranteed, such as capitalists, merchants, and especially officials, who receive their regular salary from the State. They will be opposed to war and would rather see the nation dishonoured; but in such cases the condition of the lower classes must be taken into consideration, and not that of the well-to-do, who live on the ignorance, good-nature, and weaknesses of the people. However," Skobelev added, "the Russian nation is so constituted that, in cases where our national honour is in question, even the well-fed classes of society would rather undergo bitter privations and make every sacrifice than part with their national honour. They will grumble at the bad state of affairs, but nevertheless they will bring their mites."

CHAPTER X.

FOR Skobeleff everything he undertook was important. In this respect he did not distinguish small and insignificant from great things. Every undertaking, although it might not lie within the province of his own speciality, he prepared for carefully, and when he entered on it he displayed a knowledge of every detail connected with it. Once he became interested in the subject of communications in Russia, in railways and canals; and after a few weeks' study he completely astounded a railway engineer, whom he met accidentally, by conclusively proving to him the impracticability of a scheme he had advocated. He beat him, too, with his own weapons, by technical considerations and mathematical calculations, &c. Distrusting everyone in matters of science, he liked to be his own master in everything, and did not turn back before the difficulties of acquiring knowledge, or the expenditure of time. Had he been appointed attorney-general to the Holy Synod, there can be no doubt but that he would have appeared before the reverend fathers in council, in about a month's time,

fully initiated in the mysteries of the canonical laws, the regulations of monasteries, and all the other rules and statutes of the clergy. After the most arduous passage to Bia, on the road to Zimnitsa, he was found in the barn of some Roumanian nobleman, lying on the hay and reading.

"Is it possible that you are going to work still?" he was asked.

Everybody was dead beat with fatigue.

"If we do not work we shall get the enemy on our back," was his reply.

"What are you studying?"

"A work by a French military engineer on earth-works."

"But why should you study that?"

"How do you mean?"

"You know we are going to have a corps of engineers to do that sort of work."

"That is all very well—but the general commanding a division should know how to make trenches himself. He should know everything—otherwise, he has no right to order others."

During the passage of the Danube, Skobelev, wishing to make himself useful, volunteered for the duty of orderly aide-de-camp to General Dragomiroff, a duty which was generally allotted to some ensign or sub-lieutenant. Dragomiroff afterwards acknowledged that Skobelev fulfilled even that capacity well, and was an excellent orderly; he carried orders to the first line of attack, led small detachments into action, and discovered then already his wonderful eagle eye. When

Dragomiroff, weighed down by the enormous responsibility, was doubtful of the issue of the battle, Skobelev rode up to him radiant and happy:

“Well, I congratulate you on your victory, Dragomiroff.”

“But the affair is only beginning.”

“All the same. Look at the faces of your men.”

And, indeed, Skobelev had not his equal in military psychology. He was scarcely ever mistaken. At any given moment he knew the state of mind of the men, and could direct and lead them at his pleasure. This sympathy was partly owing to his real affection for them. It was said of Skobelev, that he would lead without hesitation tens of thousands to certain death. That is quite true. He was not sentimental, and when he undertook anything he carried it out remorselessly, without hypocritical regrets. He knew he was leading them to death, and unflinchingly *led* them, and did not *send* them. He was prepared to receive the first ball, he was first to encounter the enemy. Actions demand sacrifices, and once determined on the necessity of the action he would shrink from no sacrifice. Skobelev would often tell his men openly: “I am sending you into death, comrades. Do you see that position? It cannot be taken. And I do not intend to take it. I want the Turks to concentrate all their strength on that position, whilst I get round to them from over there. You will be defeated, but you will give my division the victory. Your death will be honourable and glorious. If you are beaten back—retreat; but only to attack again with renewed vigour.

Do you hear me! As long as you are alive, fight to the last man." One must have been present to understand with what cheers these words were received by the men thus despatched to certain death. These were not passive gladiators condemned to death against their will, and saluting their Cæsar; they were comrades in arms taking a last farewell of their favourite general, and conscious that their death was really necessary, that it would be the means of victory. It was a conscious sacrifice, and on that account all the more heroic, all the more noble. He was said not to love his men. But a soldier, like a child, cannot be cheated. The soldier knows perfectly who loves him, and who does not. Him who loves him he trusts, but who does not he has no confidence in, nor does he show him any remarkable affection. Nevertheless, there was no general so loved and trusted as was Skobelev. Looking at his clear, determined blue eyes, his noble forehead, his firm mouth, which testified to his inflexible energy, the men could themselves see that when occasion wanted he could be pitiless and resolute. Nor can weak-nerved old women in uniforms be sympathetic to anyone. But Skobelev loved his men and manifested that love in his care for their welfare. His division, when commanded by him, was always clothed, shod, and fed under seemingly the most impossible conditions. To attain this object he stopped at nothing. After a desperate fight, he would throw himself fatigued on his bed to sleep. But three hours later he would be up again. What for? To inspect the camp-kettles, and see what his men had for breakfast. No one hunted

down with such severity as he did the barbarians who cheated the soldiers of their food and starved them. Skobelev trusted no one. He would satisfy his own eyes that every soldier had a pound and a half of meat in his kit, that he got as much bread as he wanted, and received his due allowance of corn-brandy. During the siege of Plevna his men even had tea. On meeting a soldier he would generally stop him and inquire :

“ Have you had your tea to-day? ”

“ Yes, your Excellency.”

“ Morning and evening? ”

“ Yes, your Excellency.”

“ Do you receive your corn-brandy? Do you get your proper rations of meat? ”

And woe be to the captain of the company if these questions were met with a negative. In such cases Skobelev knew no mercy, and would accept no justification.

As soon as a halt was made anywhere for a couple of days, ditches were dug for baths, and in the morning the soldiers washed in them. He contrived to construct baths in the trenches, and even established a musical choir there for the amusement of the men. When the Bulgarian winter commenced his men were without furs. Of course the commissariat had not given them a thought. What was to be done? It was most important to clothe at least the sentries and men on duty. There were no regimental funds wherewith to buy them in Roumania ; Skobelev himself was, as usual, also without money. There was nothing for it but



SKOBELEFF'S FATHER.

To face p. 79.

to apply to his father. But the "Pasha," notwithstanding his good-nature, was miserly:

"I have no money. You are a spendthrift. Fancy clothing the men at my expense! Impossible."

A few days later Skobeleff learned that a Roumanian had brought several hundred fur coats to Bogotta. He at once ordered the baggage-waggon to fetch them, and himself galloped off to his father's quarters at Bogotta:

"Good morning, Father," he said, and kissed his hand.

"How much is it?" the father at once inquired, knowing well the meaning of this sudden filial affection.

"How much of what?"

"How much money is it you want? I can see through you. You are cleaned out again, I suppose."

"What are you thinking of? I have even several thousands with me—help me to buy fur coats for my men. You know that I do not understand these things."

The father's face was lighted up with a self-satisfied smile.

"Of course—as though you understood anything!"

"How can I, without you? I am beginning to appreciate your counsels and advice in general."

The old man was quite thawed:

"Well, well, all right."

"No, really, without you I can do nothing."

The father got dressed, and they went off to the Roumanian merchant. For three hours they kept sorting and packing the furs. As soon as a waggon

was full it was despatched to Plevna to the quarters of the 16th division, and another drove up. Skobelev's father inspected each coat separately, pulled at it, smelled at it, almost tasted it to see that it was good, until the perspiration stood in large drops on his brow. At length the last waggon was loaded and driven off. Suddenly the scene changed.

"Well, good-bye, Father. Cossack, my horse!"

Skobelev jumped into the saddle, when the Roumanian rushed up to him: "To whom shall I send the account?"

"Oh, to my father! Father, pay him please, I will return you the money."

With these words Skobelev put spurs to his horse, and before his father quite knew what to say, the speaker and the coats were gone.

Noblesse oblige, and the old man was forced to pay the bill, whilst the sentries and outposts in Skobelev's division were warmly clad. Thanks to this circumstance there was not a single case of death from freezing among the regiments that crossed the Balkans under Skobelev. This incident is a fair illustration of the young General's devotion to the welfare of his men. Later his father came to him at Kazanlik, and commenced reproaching him.

"My men, thank my father! It is his fur coats you are wearing."

"Thank you, your Excellency."

"You are a nice son. You don't kiss your father's hand for nothing. But I was not quite sharp enough for you then."

This remark was met with roars of laughter.

The relations between father and son were very hearty; and occasionally very amusing. They both held the same rank in the army, but the son was his father's senior because he commanded a larger corps, had the order of St. George *au coup*, &c. &c. This, though it pleased the father, yet made him jealous.

"But, after all, I am your senior!" young Skobelev would sometimes say to tease him. The old General would remain morosely silent. "I have served and served until I have over-taken you. Now, do you really mean to say, Papa, that you are not vexed?"

"Then I won't give you any more money."

"How do you mean?"

"Simply, I won't give you any more. Live on your pay."

"Papa, how wonderfully handsome you still are!"

"Now, leave off, if you please."

"Do tell me something about the Hungarian campaign, and how you got the Cross of St. George. My father, gentlemen, is a brave fellow. He has my blood in him."

"I won't give you any more, notwithstanding."

Skobelev was always in want. He never had money; for he spent it with the prodigality of a Roman patrician. If he was going down the streets of Bukharest and a flower-girl offered her merchandise, he would turn to his companion, whoever he might be, and ask him to lend him money:

"Give her half an imperial!"

Officers in want always came to him for aid; these

were not necessarily of his division. An officer on his way to his regiment, quartered far off, who had spent all his money, and had nothing wherewith to continue his journey, would naturally apply to Skobelev.

“How much do you want?”

The officer would get confused.

“Will twenty half-imperials be enough?”

“Even ten would suffice.”

“Then take them.”

He forgot what people owed him, and had an equally bad memory for his own debts. Though scrupulously particular in all matters where the interests of the State were involved, he kept his own accounts but carelessly. And his carelessness was taken advantage of to the utmost. When his money was all spent he commenced diplomatic negotiations with his father.

Generally the latter refused him. Then it was young Skobelev's turn to be angry. “You are so miserly——”

“All right, all right, no pocket is large enough for you.”

“But let me explain——”

“I have known all about it and understood it long ago. I myself have only ten half-imperials left.”

“There, gentlemen; you see how he denies me the common necessities of life!—I owe all my career to your parsimony.”

“How do you make that out?”

“Why, when they closed the Universities I wanted to go and study abroad, but you would not give me the money, and I was obliged to enter the Life Guards. Even then you did not give me enough money to sup-

port your name with becoming dignity. I was forced to join a line regiment of hussars for economy's sake, and marched against the rebels in Poland. But you did not back me up even in the hussars."

"Continually paid your debts," the father remarked parenthetically.

"Perhaps a few kopeks. But you did not back me properly. I had to go to Tiflis. At Tiflis life is expensive; your parsimony drove me to Turkistan, from thence to Khiva."

"Very good for you."

"But fate has punished you; fate is always just."

"In what way?"

"Why, because I am your senior in rank now!"

"You urchin!"

"Then you won't give me any money?"

"No."

"Good-bye, General!" and they parted.

He was very fond of his father, and was much loved by him in return; but such scenes were of constant occurrence between them. His filial affection was, however, quite devoid of sentimentality. Once he fell very ill at Constantinople, and his sickness took a dangerous turn. The father accidentally heard of his indisposition and rushed off to Constantinople.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Why?"

"Ill, and never let me know!"

"It never occurred to me."

The old man was much grieved; but his son could not understand the reason.

On another occasion the father visited his son in the trenches.

“Show me your position. Where is it most exposed?”

“Do you want to get embalmed? Or has the old fire awakened?”

“I don’t wear my general’s epaulets for cowardice.”

And the old General selected one of the most exposed spots and took his stand there.

“You are a fine fellow,” young Skobeleff exclaimed admiringly; “you take after me. Now give the men something.”

“Here are ten gold pieces.”

“That’s too little.”

“How much do you want me to give them, then?”

“My men, my father gives you a rouble each! Drink his health!”

This was met with a hearty cheer. When the time came to leave the old man said:

“Well, I am not coming to see you again.”

“Ah! Too dangerous, is it?”

“What nonsense! I don’t mean that. You ruin me. Reckon out how much I have to send your men now.”

“There! you are not afraid of death, but tremble at parting with your money. What do you do with it?”

“I have not much to spend.”

When his father died Skobeleff appreciated his wise economy. He left him enormous estates and a fortune of the existence of which he had not even had an idea.

“To my extreme astonishment I find myself a rich man!” he exclaimed.

Later Skobelev changed with the years, and lost entirely his old prodigality; but the needy he always helped liberally. “Give to him that asketh,” might have been his motto; he certainly made it the principle of his life. He was cheated and robbed, but he never instituted proceedings. Once a servant of his embezzled three hundred pounds, which had been confided to his care.

“What have you done with the money?”

“Lost it.”

“What a fool!”

“How can you let that pass by. It is quite clear he stole them,” his friends remonstrated.

“But suppose he has really lost them. What would his position be then?”

Another time one of the people whom Skobelev trusted abstracted the diamonds from his sword and sold them in Constantinople. The affair was so serious that everyone wished to see it followed up; but Skobelev put a stop to it.

“Let him be; don’t speak a word about it.”

“But, my dear Sir, how can a thing like that be passed over?”

“Because it is a disgrace.”

“The diamonds should at least be bought up. The sword is a sword of honour.”

“Forget all about them; let the matter pass as though nothing had happened.”

On meeting the delinquent he said not a word about

the affair to him. He only left off shaking hands with him. He did not even send him away.

“I keep him near me for the sake of his brother.”

Later this brother, whom Skobeleff loved for his bravery and readiness, repaid his generosity with the blackest ingratitude; contributing the most melancholy page to Skobeleff's life, and making him distrustful of everyone.

CHAPTER XI.

SKOBELEFF was accessible to almost everybody. It must be remembered that he was a military man, and accustomed to the rigidity of military discipline. Nevertheless, everybody—from an ensign to a general—was at his ease with him. Skobelev was a good dialectician, and possessed a wonderful amount of information; he was fond of discussions, and never avoided them. In that respect he was quite indifferent whether he was speaking to a private, a lieutenant, or any other subaltern; in his opinion, when once a question was raised, everyone had a right to support his own views and defend them. Here the General could be met on a footing of equality. Sometimes these discussions would continue for some length of time, but nothing would enrage Skobelev so much as to be put off with a phrase.

“What am I to do? You are my superior officer; according to discipline I must not reply.”

“What do you mean by discipline? We are not on

parade now. It is a common trick to hide one's want of knowledge, and one's narrowness of mind, under the cover of discipline."

He could not bear people to acquiesce, without opposition, in all he said.

"He has nothing in him. Whatever you say to him he holds holy. He is a kind of looking-glass."

But he was still more offended when this acquiescence took the form of servility.

"How is it possible for me not to agree with you?" a major once said to him; "you are a lieutenant-general."

"And what has that to do with it?"

"You can put me under arrest."

"That is why you are so hectored over because you have not even courage enough to face that."

Flatterers he hated more than anything. Those gentlemen who hoped to get into his good graces by such means made a great mistake.

"Is it possible that he can take me for such a fool!" he would sometimes exclaim. "Why, it is positively rude. As though I did not know myself. What does he come to tell me about myself for? And without blushing, too!"

But, on the other hand, he admired straightforwardness and frankness, even though it might border on impudence.

His aides-de-camp did not stand on ceremony in this respect.

"You are always captious, and find fault for no reason at all," an aide-de-camp once told him.

He was young and full of life, and sometimes gave vent to his spirits after a very boyish fashion.

"What is the matter with your Excellency?" an aide-de-camp once remarked to him : "you jump about in a most unbecoming manner. You should remember you are a general."

Later on he grew much more serious, especially after the expedition to Akhal Tekké. But during the Russo-Turkish war he was a boy with boys, and as noisy and cheerful as the youngest of his officers. He understood a joke, and was the first to laugh at one. Even wit at his own expense amused him. There were no traces of the dull lamahism about him which characterised some of the Chinese idols of the period. "At my table we are all comrades," he said; and there certainly was a feeling of heartiness and sincerity, and a freedom from all servility and stiffness, in his society. Sometimes former comrades in arms would come to see him, men who had stopped on the ladder of promotion at some captaincy, or something of that sort. He would greet them as old friends, as though he had only parted from them yesterday, and called them by their Christian names.

Of course all this was off duty. On duty there was scarcely a more exacting man than he. It was impossible to be more severe. Those who thought their intimacy with the General would admit of the same easy familiarity on duty, which was permitted them at his table, made a very great mistake. He was often even cruel. He never overlooked a breach of discipline in a friend. In questions bearing on the army or action he would admit of no excuse, and showed

no mercy. McGahan, with whom he was on very good terms, once offered a suggestion during action. "Silence. Leave me at once!" Skobelevff shouted.

A colonel in the English service, Havelock, the correspondent of the "Times," I believe, ventured to intrude his remarks during the taking of Zeleni Gory on the 28th October.

Skobelevff called a Cossack, and ordered him to escort the Colonel. "Will you be so good as to return to Brestowetz," he said to him in English.

Skobelevff was accused of ingratiating himself with the correspondents, by way of accounting for the praises they heaped on him. But the injustice of this calumny has been already pointed out. He knew the rights of the press, and acknowledged them. He did not treat its representatives with the contempt of a purse-proud idiot, but with the respect of a cultivated man. He gave them every explanation he considered possible to furnish, and permitted them to be present during the fighting. They were at once admitted into the circle of his companions in arms. His knowledge of five foreign languages enabled him to speak to the English, French, Germans, and Italians in their native tongues, and they were thus likewise enabled to know him better; but all Skobelevff's circle can bear witness that there was no homage paid to the correspondents, and that they did not enjoy any special privileges in his division. As far as comfort went, indeed, the commanders of other divisions showed them more attention. There each correspondent received a Cossack as a body-servant. This Skobelevff never allowed.

“Cossacks are not servants,” he would say; “they must serve Russia and not you.”

Why, then, did the correspondents, in spite of these inconveniences, always come to Skobelev? Because, owing to the frankness of his conversation, his society was always interesting. Not only in action, but in the intervals, the energetic young General was always at work. He undertook reconnaissances, taught his troops trench work, rode round his position. There was always something to see and something to write about. Besides which, his society was instructive. Here discussions were heard, serious conversations were held, important subjects broached. But he himself was the attraction more particularly; he was full of energy and interest. His *friends*, of course, ascribed his popularity to other causes. An anecdote may be repeated here which will fully illustrate my meaning.

About eighteen months after the war I was on my way to Moscow. My travelling companion was a military man. At first he puffed and frowned at me, but after a time he was pacified and commenced to talk. The conversation turned on the war.

“You were also engaged in it?” I asked.

“Oh yes. Only I got no orders.”

“How was that?”

“Oh, I had not enough money!”

“Not enough money?”

“No. Not enough for the newspaper correspondents, who get twenty-five kopeks a line. They did not talk about me, so I got no orders.”

“Why, did the correspondents recommend officers for promotion?”

“They had a good deal to do with it. The newspaper people were in high esteem.”

We spoke of Skobelev. He had not yet recognised me.

“Nemirovitch-Dantchenko invented him.”

“How do you mean?”

“Simply enough. They used to get drunk together, so he invented him.”

“Do you know Nemirovitch-Dantchenko? Have you ever seen him?”

“Ever so often. Frequently seen him drunk. Know him well, very well.”

“Dear me. And I had heard that he was a teetotaler.”

“Not in the least. He drinks like a fish.”

When we had got close to Moscow I could no longer restrain myself. “We have passed the time so pleasantly together, will you allow me to introduce myself?”

“Very pleased, very pleased. Whom have I the honour of speaking to?”

“My name is Nemirovitch-Dantchenko.”

“What! Nemirovitch-Dantchenko?”

“Yes.”

“He who——”

“He who——”

The General gave me no time to finish my sentence, but disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

THIS is not a biography of Skobelev, it is merely a collection of fragmentary reminiscences of him. For this reason there will be no detailed account given of the military operations he conducted. Those desirous of making themselves acquainted with the military events he took part in will find them described in my "Year of War." In the present work nothing but personal recollections will be found; and if I am successful in presenting a life-like and vivid image of Skobelev to my readers, showing them the man as he was, loved and admired by all privileged to enjoy his society—then my aim will have been attained and I shall not have laboured in vain. It is as yet too early to write a systematic and dispassionate biography of our great General; it is only feasible to draw the outlines of this genial Russian warrior's character on the canvas. He was a bright star darting through the gloomy heavens, rapidly rising to his full magnitude before the whole world, which was astounded at his exploits, and as suddenly leaving us again. As time passes on, his loss

seems to grow in importance. Military writers, such as the talented Mr. A. N. Masloff, who knew him well, have described Skobelev the strategist, Skobelev the tactician, Skobelev the soldier—it is for me to speak of the man. Every day his absence is more and more acutely felt, until one feels goaded to ask oneself: Whom could his death be necessary to, what sense could there be in such a sudden, fatal blow? A freak of destiny! What a stupid, pointless joke!

After the passage of the Danube, Skobelev distinguished himself on the heights of Shipka and before the trenches of Plevna. But as yet he was not recognised: he was held in contempt. The victor of the dressing-gown sellers was held to be a brave man, but nothing more.

“He must be kept well in hand.” “The easy campaigns and cheap triumphs of Central Asia have spoilt him.” “Perhaps he will serve well,” others observed loftily; “but we must keep our eyes on him.”

And in the meantime he was incomparably better informed and cleverer than these gentlemen of the staff.

I met Skobelev just then at Tirnova. Seeing he wished to open his heart to somebody, I went to his quarters with him.

“Ah!” he said, “it is close here. It is maddening. I can see their mistakes, know better than they, and have to sit still and hold my tongue.”

“Why be silent?”

“And may the victor of the Dressing-gowns have a voice, think you? The best of them are surprised

at my interfering. I have all I want. I have my rank and my cross of St. George—what more do I want? Why can't I keep quiet? Why don't I give others a chance to distinguish themselves? That is their point of view. That my heart grows sick when I see our Russian affairs mismanaged never strikes them. Ah! it is very bad. We are an incapable, disorderly people. We have always to pay for what we get with expensive mistakes and disagreeable disenchantments; and when a few years have passed the old lessons are forgotten. We take no example from history; we take no warning from the past. We refuse to learn anything, and we forget everything. It is a fearful bore! Is this the way affairs should be managed? And the root of the whole evil lies in having these strategists of the study."

During the second battle of Plevna Skobelev commanded a small corps of cavalry. The whole of that day he fought in the first line of skirmishers, now encouraging the men, now rushing to the support of weak flanks. During the whole of that day nobody saw him rest. He never left the saddle; not even during the infantry engagement—thus offering a splendid mark to the Turkish rifles. Two horses were killed under him, a third was wounded. He personally led companies into the field, and commanded separate troops of Cossacks. At last, when the retreat was commenced, he sheathed his sword and dismounted, and himself brought up the rear of his retreating men. Was it not strange that the conqueror of Fergan and Khiva, the officer with so long and brilliant a military career behind him, should be assigned a subordinate post in the execution of

the plans of others, instead of being himself one of the leaders in the battle ! As a subordinate carrying out instructions, his great military talents were thrown away, and nothing but his bravery could come into play. Besides, it was the way to kill his interest in the whole affair. It is impossible, seeing the mistakes of others, to serve them zealously notwithstanding ; and a man cannot force himself to carry out a programme the stupidity of which he sees plainly. This led a general to make the following epigrammatic *mot*.

“ If Skobelev was my subordinate I would send him to the rear ; but if I were asked whom I should myself wish to serve under I should say, Skobelev.”

His genius was seen to best advantage when he alone was entrusted with the leadership, when all responsibility lay on him. Fergan, Zeleny-Gory, the passage of the Balkans, the battle of Sheynoff, the march to Adrianople, Akhal-Tekké, testify to the justice of this remark.

On the retreat from Plevna it was necessary to halt so as to keep the Turks in check, and allow our troops to retire. At the head of a troop of Cossacks Skobelev opened fire on a comparatively overpowering number of the enemy ; then, lying down on a soldier's cloak, he went to sleep, ordering the Cossacks not to retreat until he awoke. And the small band of soldiers succeeded in keeping the Turks at a respectful distance, notwithstanding their endeavours to push them back.

“ Is it possible that you could have slept ? ” Skobelev was asked afterwards.

“ Yes, I slept.”

“ Among such surroundings! ”

“ When necessary, I can sleep among any surroundings.”

Of course all this was set down to fatalism and bravado. But all kinds of explanations could be offered; the fact remains that there are not many fatalists of that sort knocking about!

Then came the brilliant affair at Lovtcha, so well known that it would be useless to repeat it here. But the third battle of Plevna, notwithstanding that Skobelev ought to have retreated from the redoubts he had taken, opened the eyes of all. The astonishment of everyone was equivalent to a brilliant victory. Here Skobelev spoke, and his voice was obeyed. In the dust and fire of battle he kept observing, watching, studying, and at the same time composed those remarkable lines, quoted below, which were despatched to Prince Imeritinsky. We quote them because they show Skobelev at that early period not only as a brave general, but also as a cool and experienced leader. Skobelev explains his reasons for postponing the attack.

“ A most important consideration was the necessity of strengthening our fortifications in the position we had taken ; this proved a matter of great difficulty, owing to the deplorably deficient equipment of our men with trenching tools throughout the campaign. The men dug ditches with the visors of their caps and their hands. When grape-bushes had to be pulled up to open out the esplanade, this was done with the hands. I may here take the liberty of offering a few remarks on the subject of this deficient equipment, in view of the great

importance, in the present struggle, of earthworks on the field of battle. Infantry that has been in severe action generally loses its trenching-tools. Our soldier, marching over difficult and unopened ground, especially in hot weather, disembarrasses himself first of his trenching tools, then follows his cloak, and lastly his bag of biscuits. For this reason the detachment which has reached its halting-point does not possess the means wherewith to cover itself against the deadly fire of the enemy ; a course always adopted by infantry (1) in the American war, (2) in the Carlist war, and (3) now accepted as a rule by the Turks. In view of this it would appear to be better, either to send the tools after the attacking force, or to have a special corps attached to each regiment on whom the duty of fortifying positions abandoned by the enemy should devolve. The inadequate means at our disposal for the construction of earthworks must not be passed over either. Of the 20,000 men in your Highness's division there are only one corps of sappers, and that by accident, composed of thirty-five non-commissioned officers and men, and there is not a single engineer, notwithstanding the existence of an Engineering Academy which sends ten engineers into the army annually. There can be no doubt in my mind that the French campaign of 1870 would have ended with much better results for the French had they, during the second period of the campaign, and in view of the present armament of infantry and the comparatively weak effects, as far as decisiveness goes, of long-range artillery, confined themselves strictly to unexpected strategic attacks (especially along the

lines of railways, for instance), combined with a purely tactical mode of defence with the aid of field-fortification."

The days of the third battle of Plevna are a poem full of brilliancy for some, of disgrace to others. This battle has been described by me in my novel "Plevna and Shipka," and there is no need to describe it here ; I shall only give episodes specially bearing on Skobelev. The best account of the third battle of Plevna is by the official correspondent of the "Pravitelstvenny Vestnik," Mr. Vsevolod Krestoffsky, in his "Twenty Months with the Active Army," (vol. ii. pp. 44-124).

The following, on Mr. Krestoffsky's authority, are Skobelev's own words, and form a good epigraph on the whole affair:—

"Napoleon the Great was grateful to his marshals when they succeeded in winning half an hour's time for him to effect his victory in. I won days for you, but you would not support me !"

"Until the third battle of Plevna," Skobelev told me, "I was young ; but I have come out of it an old man. Not, of course, physically nor intellectually. I feel as though years had elapsed between Lovtchi and our defeat. It is a night-mare which may lead me to commit suicide. The recollection of that slaughter-house is a sort of Nemesis, only more revengeful than the classical. I will tell you honestly, I sought death there. If I did not find it, it was no fault of mine !"

CHAPTER XIII.

ON the day of the third battle of Plevna a figure could be seen descending from the ridge of a hill, mounted on a white horse and followed by a few officers and two or three Cossacks. The figure on the white horse proved to be Skobeleff—he was all in white, beautiful and joyous.

“Ah! what fine fellows! what warriors!” he shouted in a loud and excited tone of voice as he approached a regiment fresh on the field and waiting for orders. “Well, my men, go and finish the work. A regiment, there, has retreated from the redoubts. You are not of that sort, are you? You are all picked men, are you not? What handsome fellows you are! Where are you from?” he asked, as he stopped his horse before a snub-nosed yokel.

“From the Vitibsk Government, your Excellency.”

“Why, the very sight of you alone is enough to make the Turks run.”

“It is, your Excellency.”

“Now, you look out. Don’t let me see you without the St. George on the day after to-morrow. Do you

hear? Use your eyes, my men; don't shoot blindly. March straight up to the redoubt without wasting powder. There is no mind in shooting. Shooting is all right when you are sitting behind embrasures and are on the defensive. You understand me?"

"Yes, your Excellency."

"That's right. Whom are you to fire at when the enemy is behind his works? Your bullets can't touch him. These fellows must be got at with the bayonet. Do you hear? And you, old knight; are you from Sebastopol?" he said, turning to another. "What have you the St. George for?"

"I got it at Malakhoff, your Excellency."

Skobelev took off his cap to him.

"Show these young fellows how a Russian soldier fights and dies. Captain, present that old man to me after the battle if he be still alive; I will recommend him for a commission. Ah! what fine fellows! How I should like to go with you; but I must support the young beginners. You have smelt fire already; you know how to fight. Good-bye, comrades; we shall meet at the redoubt. You will wait for me there?"

"We will wait, your Excellency."

"Well, mind you do. You have given your word, now you must keep it. Good-bye, Captain."

The General rode up to a ditch; on looking into it he beheld an officer lying there. He rode a few steps towards him, when the officer jumped up, looked confused, and saluted.

The General gave a scarcely perceptible smile.

"What, Lieutenant, had you lain down to rest?"

"My boots—my feet—" stuttered the lieutenant, getting red in the face and feeling nothing but shame now, only shame, and not an atom of cowardice.

"Do you belong to that company?"

"Yes."

"What a tall, fine fellow you are! The soldiers will be proud to look at you marching under fire. You will lead them well. Overtake them, and tell your commanding officer that I order him to send you first with the volunteers—you hear?" The General assumed a stern expression. "An officer dare not be a coward. The private may, in his case it is excusable. But an officer cannot. Go at once. Lead your detachment into action. Your name?"

"Doronovitch."*

"Well, look here. I wish to hear that you were the first to enter the redoubt. Do you hear? The first! Then I will forget this ditch and your boots—I shall forget them and never refer to them. Remember, you will show an example."

And Skobeleff stooped down and held out his hand to the lieutenant. The latter seized it gratefully.

"I promise your Excellency——"

"I believe you, Lieutenant. We meet at the redoubt."

Doronovitch looked after the General for an instant, and then ran to join his regiment.

Suddenly the rising ground was covered with troops. They were scattered about carelessly and had crawled up like moles. They were evidently resting before the

* Of course this is not the officer's real name.

decisive charge. The dark mass of men below had broken up into groups running forward rapidly, the groups into single individuals. These individuals would often stop abruptly, throw their hands wildly into the air, and fall down. There were those nasty yellow earthworks ; there was that horrid rampart ! How many more lives would it demand ? The dark mass drew nearer and nearer to it ; the distance between that yellow earth and those detached groups was visibly decreasing. The men ran rapidly. The troops that had remained behind suddenly ran after them, and quickly covered the space dividing them from the attacking party. Another minute and those who had seemed lagging behind had scaled the hill. There were the indistinct echoes of a cheer which, rising on the right flank, were caught up on the left, and resounded in the centre. There ! That was the fierce and blood-thirsty roll of the drum. The columns of men moved with still greater rapidity from below to the top. But they had ceased to preserve their formation ; they marched in straggling order—anyhow. There ! clouds of smoke covered the redoubt ; the hill seemed to tremble and tumble to pieces with the uproar. This volley was followed by occasional shots, a fresh cloud of smoke and a fresh volley. Someone, most likely an officer, mounted on horseback, rode out of the hollow ; the soldiers ran after him. He drove the spurs boldly into his horse's flanks, and the noble animal carried him at full gallop to the top of the hill. Another minute and the rider and horse rolled back again into the very hollow from which they had emerged.

“They ’ll take it, our men will, won’t they?” said Doronovitch to his captain.

“Of course they will!” his captain answered cheerfully, watching how the distance between the dark mass of men and the yellow earth was steadily diminishing. “Of course they will! One blow and it is done!”

“How well-timed that drum was!”

The dark figures of our soldiers kept drawing nearer and nearer; they swarmed up to the very ramparts; but suddenly they appeared to stop and call their comrades together. In the meantime the volleys from thence followed each other with deadly precision. The redoubt seemed a live monster vomiting fire at our brave soldiers, baring its steel fangs to its besiegers and bristling with bayonets like a porcupine. They had got quite close to the rampart; their cheers broke out like a flame along their ranks and were wafted over the whole of that hill.

“Good God! What cowards!” the captain screamed in anguish.

“Why? Why? What is the matter?”

The captain pointed silently towards his right. A cowardly group of men had stopped short, while their comrades had almost reached the redoubt, laid down, and commenced firing on the Turks. Their example was followed by larger and larger numbers. This was felt to be an ill-omened act. The cheering grew fainter and died away. The men who had got to the very ramparts also fell down and opened fire, thus wasting their energy. Musketry-fire was poured in unceasingly.

At last they all left off. The handful of cowards had infected all with a panic. It was evident that they would not push on. They could not march on shooting, they could not aim as they marched. Firing when attacking is a sure sign of cowardice. They retreated. They could not remain lying down under fire for ever. To go back was even more difficult than to advance, there would be greater losses—but they did not advance. The regiment was broken up at the redoubts. The men rushed back like waves and ran down. Those in the rear were the first to run. They were the original cowards. They were rapidly followed by the others. But not by all. Every instant someone stumbled, fell down, and remained on the spot. The hill was gradually covered with dead bodies. What masses of them! The crowd of flying soldiers dwindled down to isolated individuals. The bravest morosely separated and each ran on alone; but the cowards kept like sheep, huddled up in groups and screamed out something to the reinforcements coming up. The panic was thus communicated to them, and instead of marching on, they turned and ran too. In the meantime the numbers of dead kept on increasing enormously. One spot on the hill was completely black with bodies. There were more than ten there—oh! many more than ten! Clenching his teeth the captain marched down; he marched down rapidly. His men knew what that meant.

“Only once more and the affair would have been over,” muttered one of the lieutenants.

“A herd, a cowardly herd!” the captain screamed

fiercely, dreading his own men might catch the infection.

Up came the first groups of fleeing soldiers.

"Where are you running to?" the captain shouted. "Cowards! poltroons! good-for-nothings!"

They had nearly all stopped. But one, too panic-stricken to see, ran up against the captain.

"Cowards! You were at the redoubts and have run! Shame!"

"Your honour," said a soldier, running up, "I have been up to the Turkish redoubt, up to the very ramparts, by God I have! I was the first under the ramparts," he continued almost crying. "I was just going to jump, when they shouted: 'Back, back, back!' Well, and so we all ran. Oh! good God! we all ran!"

"If we had all acted together——" said another; but he had no time to finish his sentence, a ball laid him on the soft ground.

"Why have you disgraced yourselves, my men?" shouted the captain. But he was not listened to. The soldiers merely looked him in the face and continued their flight.

But now a voice was heard thundering from behind.

"What is this disgrace? What is this flock of sheep running for? Halt! Are you running from the redoubt? Shame! I won't command such dogs! March against the Turks! You are no soldiers! You have thrown away your muskets, you animals!"

The captain turned round. It was Skobelev mounted on his white charger, and riding to meet the fugitives.

“Follow me. I will show you how to thrash the Turks. Close up, there ! Follow me, my men ; I will lead you myself. He who leaves me should be ashamed of himself. Now then, drummers, look alive !”

The loud roll of drums drowned the sound of volleys upon volleys of musketry, tearing up the ground all round, and deadened the roar of guns from the Turkish embrasures, which were lighted up now and again with a lurid glare.

The chain moved along slowly. The hard, morose faces of the men were lit up with rage. Their clenched teeth and the terrible fire in their eyes promised little mercy to the defenders of the redoubt. They marched along in silence, and keeping their distances with the regularity of a parade. Their hands held the cold barrels of their guns with firmness and determination ; after their late excitement their hearts beat evenly ; they did not seem even to think of danger as they resolutely pushed on. No attention was paid to their falling comrades—they thought of nothing. The leaden bees filled the air and buzzed past their ears and made but a slight impression, a very slight impression. The instinct of self-preservation had not been extinguished in them, but they had become petrified, as it were. They felt that they could not avoid what was decreed, and their only wish as they looked at the grey outlines of the redoubt was to get over the ground more rapidly and reach the Turks as soon as possible. And when a comrade in arms was laid low, there was no pity for him, there was but room for the thirst for revenge in those savage hearts. In front of them was a hollow.

Would they keep on as steadily? They would have to halt here for five or ten minutes or more. Would they maintain their formation and their cold-bloodedness, or would they forget themselves and rush on in spite of orders, and thus give the cowards an excuse for remaining behind?

"Comrades, see what they are doing to our men!" exclaimed the General, without dismounting.

A groan passed through the ranks.

"See how those brutes are torturing our wounded!"

The groans grew louder and louder. The cold perspiration stood in large drops on their brows. One of the officers burst into tears.

From behind those grey earthworks the Turks emerged one by one to the rising ground. They stooped down to our wounded countrymen, and then the cold air was pierced with screams. These screams grew; they sounded like a mixture of entreaties and madness. Evidently the wounded men tried to escape; this their tormentors permitted them to do, until the loss of blood and fatigue overpowered them, when their triumphant enemies would overtake them. We could see how one of our wounded fellows rose and with unsteady hand fired at an approaching Turk. The latter jumped aside for a moment, and then threw himself on the man; and a searching scream, clearly called forth by the most fearful anguish, followed the action, and was carried to our ears. The General determined to take advantage of the rage which possessed our men.

"Comrades, forward, without a minute's pause! Charge these animals running. Let us save those that

have been spared and punish the infamous. I will lead you myself. Do you hear? Lieutenant Doronovitch, you will command the forlorn hope. Occupy that trench!"

Rapidly the hollow was cleared. The volunteers for the forlorn hope ran up the rising ground. The hill trembled under the sound of the maddening fire. The ramparts seemed to be falling to pieces and sinking into the sandy foundations; the sound was like the shattering of primeval granite. Just in front of the redoubt was a small trench from which issued a perfect shower of bullets, and the clouds of smoke accompanying them rose up and covered the redoubt. But soon the fog aided the smoke in hiding the redoubt from view. Darkness surrounded us. The redoubt could no more be seen; it was only heard. The storm of battle raged in this dense fog. It was as though evil spirits had torn themselves free from the chains of hell and were revelling in the depths of this fog, mixed with the smoke of gunpowder; it was as though the king of darkness himself were holding his sanguinary holiday down here amidst the rage and tumult of the storm. An excited imagination might have fancied that the planets had dashed together, and, in the general conflagration, fallen into a thousand pieces, when the salutes of friendly musketry reached the ears of our men through the general din, and mingled their deafening thunder with the crash and noise of steel weapons. Clouds of bullets met our brave volunteers, bunches of grape-shot swept everything they encountered from the ridge. Grenades from distant redoubts pierced the ground and exploded into splinters, the sharp edges of which

seemed to be burning with eagerness. Up above, it was not more pleasant. There shrapnels exploded with a sound like the snapping of gigantic cords by invisible hands in the air. Blood was flowing in pools. In those dark pools one could hear the struggles of dying men; but their last death-agonies were drowned by the thundering roar of the fierce tempest. As our men marched on, their wounded comrades came running to meet them, and would catch hold of their arms and coats, as though their only salvation lay in hanging on like that.

Doronovitch could no more see anything. A fog surrounded him, and in this fog, fiends from hell seemed to disport themselves. He only remembered his promise to his general, and marched. He could not forget it; he dared not. In one of the most terrible moments of the battle, when it was scarcely possible to breathe without being choked with grape, in the whirlwind of that tempest rode the stalwart figure of Skobelev. He flew past Doronovitch; but for an instant did the latter catch sight of that remarkable figure, with his fair beard waving in the air, with nostrils dilated, with fiery eyes that seemed to be starting out of his head, and looking boldly into the darkness from whence the storm was coming to meet him. He flew past him, but he had time to shout: "Follow me, my lads, do not hold back! Remember your tortured comrades!" "Hurrah!" was the answer. Not the faint, undetermined cheer which had been heard but an hour before from the men who had fled. No; this was very different. Fierce, maddened, hoarse throats tried to

drown the roar of guns and clash of sabres with their cheers.

"Remember, my lads, there is no way back. Follow me!" screamed Doronovitch, without noticing that a small crimson stream was already running from his shoulder. "Remember your tortured comrades!" that had been thrown in at the right time. It had fallen like a spark on gunpowder, such a raging flame did it call forth in the soldiers' breasts. "Remember the tortured, hurrah!" resounded with fiercer and fiercer yells. The men in the rear stumbled and fell, but pushed on with redoubled haste to overtake the forlorn hope; the reserves, without waiting for orders, moved up. Even the wounded would not remain behind, but joined the ranks as long as they had strength to walk. One poor fellow, quite green in the face, with a bullet in his chest, kept hoarsely shouting "Hurrah!" The blood nearly choked him, he spat it out, and again with greater energy and force he shouted his challenge to the clouds of fog and gunpowder-smoke which hid the malignant redoubt from view.

Like lightning the General flew to another part of the battle; he passed in front of the Turkish trenches on his good Arab steed, he shouted a fierce welcome to the other flank, and galloped on, angry and blood-thirsty. His spurs were buried in his horse's flanks, his lips were twitching nervously, under his eyes were deep, dark lines.

"Forward! don't hold back there!" screamed Doronovitch hoarsely in the already captured trench. "Get into the redoubt on the shoulders of the fugitives!"

Follow me, my lads!" The butt end of a gun fell just at this moment on the head of a Turkish soldier and the man fell down before Doronovitch's feet like a squashed melon, his brains bespattering the surroundings.

"Forward, volunteers, forward! the redoubt is not far now!" shouted Doronovitch, rushing out of the trench.

"Here, my men, here!" the voice of Skobeleff could be heard through the raging battle. "Here they are, confound them! Here, my men! Follow me! We will take it with a single blow!"

But his last words were drowned in the thunder of grape and musketry. The air was rent with volleys upon volleys, and seemed of itself alone sufficient to drive back the attacking force.

The men had lost all formation. They pushed on in one mad crowd towards the redoubt. Thousands ran up the ridge—hundreds had fallen, and hundreds more were to fall immediately, before the ramparts could be reached. A hundred might reach them; what cared they? All they thought of was to get there. Quickly and more quickly they rushed towards that fog, from whence they could hear the loud and hearty cheering of their comrades, and where they could distinguish the loud voice of their general praising his men. Quicker! quicker! What did they care? Fresh thousands were poured against the redoubt. Again they were hidden behind the ridge, and again about a hundred reached the ramparts. Here everything was confusion; it was impossible to distinguish anything. The elements were

raging in the open field, flames sprang to the skies, the water was boiling on the ground, destroying the small and inadequate dams.

Skobeleff kept calling and encouraging his men, like a huntsman calling his hounds with his horn. Obedient to his call, they rushed up those yellow earthworks, and showers of bullets saluted them. The redoubt seemed to exhale grape-shot.

For an instant the fog cleared up, and a north wind blew, but its cold currents could not refresh those heated countenances, there was no freshness in those burning breasts. "Quicker, quicker!" shouted the men in the rear. Wounded men crawled on hands and feet towards the scene of action, tearing the ground in their rage. The dying raised themselves on their hands, and cheered with the last breath in their dying bodies. Red stripes were on the men's bayonets, blood was running down the muzzles of their guns, blood was on their hands, blood on their faces, blood everywhere. Friends could no more be distinguished from foes. The brave Kharaboff, a lieutenant, was not recognisable; he seemed to have grown; his head was thrown back, his voice rang with metallic clearness through the din, his hand had grasped his sword so firmly that the hilt was almost breaking; he was marching bravely, splendidly, in front of his men. Parfenoff was not far from him. The old man remembered Balaklava, and Malakhoff rose before his eyes. He remembered the rage that was then felt at having to give up that fort after stubborn fighting, and he shouted his hurrah in the very face of the enemy,

whose bayonets he could almost feel at his breast. A grape-shot fell in the midst of the confused and hurrying mass and made a lane, but it was filled up instantly. Fresh troops poured in and filled the vacant places, whilst from the redoubt rose fresh clouds of smoke. One young fellow, but the other day a peaceful peasant, also remembered his past, and seizing his gun by the muzzle, commenced mowing his way along with the butt-end of it.

“Allah! Allah!” resounded wildly from the ramparts. An old Turk, in a green turban and green caftan, jumped on to the ramparts, and from thence fulminated his maledictions. Parfenoff laid him low, however, and the wild cry of “Allah!” was again taken up by the enraged hordes behind him.

“Another effort, my lads,—follow me!”

Skobeleff leaped on to the earthworks of the redoubt, rolled down again, jumped up covered with mud, and hoarsely called his men to follow him—his face black, bloodthirsty, fierce. Kharaboff, Doronovitch, Iskoff, had all reached the rampart. This was the last act of the tragedy, the last and the most terrible. A hand-to-hand encounter had commenced by this time. Turks and Russians crossed bayonets. From one of the embrasures a last shot of grape was fired on the mass of flesh almost jammed up against it. Skobeleff was on the spot immediately. A bayonet was thrust against him; it nearly reached his breast. But the fine fellow with the turned-up nose had caught sight of the situation; the butt-end of his musket descended on the Turk with a dull thud, and the General was already far away,

not even knowing to whom he owed his life, scarcely realising the danger that had menaced him. The wild beast had awakened in him as well as in those fierce, charging multitudes, the wild beast that had tasted blood, the wild beast which knew no mercy. There was no order in that fight. In one part of the field we had the best of it, in another the contrary seemed to be the case ; here we were victors, there vanquished. The fighting line was so broken that we frequently attacked the enemy in his rear, and frequently he attacked us in ours.

The redoubt was taken !

The earthworks, the steel weapons, the grey cloaks, the faces and hands of the men, all were bespattered with blood. In the redoubt itself blood stood in pools ; there were pools of it outside as well. The blood evaporated in the fog, and seemed to make the atmosphere heavier than before. The boots of the victors were steeped in blood. Overcome with fatigue, our men sat down and lay down in the blood. Blood seemed to be mingled in the drops of rain descending from above ; the mist seemed to be saturated with blood. The defenders of the redoubt had nearly all remained here. Those who could get out of the ramparts sought refuge on the hill. The entire hill-side was covered with disfigured bodies. In the redoubt itself there was no room to move ; the place was crammed with corpses. There were piles of them in the corners. From underneath these piles proceeded deep groans every now and again. Parfenoff stopped aghast before one of them. The old man remembered that

it was into this corner that the Turks fled like a herd, throwing away their weapons. They stood on their knees screaming "Aman!" The old man could recall their imploring faces, their hands stretched out entreating mercy, and their heads mutely bent down to receive the blows from the butt-ends of the soldiers' muskets; and in the heat of action he thrust at and killed these Turks praying for quarter, killed them as did the others. Parfenoff looked at those piles incredulously. Had not one survived? No, everyone of the blue-jackets lay dead. There were their corpses, lying in heaps, with bayonet-wounds through and through them. They were simply exterminated. There was no mercy shown to anyone. Parfenoff was horror-struck. He turned round to look at his comrades, and saw that they shared his feelings. Not one of them felt the triumph of victory swelling in his bosom. There was no rejoicing amongst the surviving victors. They sat silently at the ramparts. Here and there small circles of smoke could be seen rising from their short wooden pipes, but there was no talking to be heard. One young fellow, a novice in the business of war, had stopped in front of an enormous Turk lying stretched out in a pool of blood, and kept looking at him attentively, as though he wished to put him a question; and the Turk lay there, his arms spread out, and his large eyes staring with lifeless rigidity at the young soldier, and neither the dead nor the living could take their eyes off each other.

The General came slowly riding up to the redoubt. He looked around him gloomily, calculating the losses

of this dreadful day. He stopped his horse before a young officer. A shadow came over his brow.

"That is Nevodin, I think?" he said, turning to his aide-de-camp.

"Yes, your Excellency!"

"He was a good officer and a Knight of St. George. Poor fellow! Order the hospital corps up at once; the wounded must be collected."

Silently he rode on to the redoubt. He dismounted, and scaled the ramparts, and surveyed the scene with penetrating eye.

"Thank you, my men, for your service," he said gently. "You have worked hard and honourably to-day; you flew on them like eagles—I saw how you fought. Lions! I am proud to command such brave fellows. Are you tired?"

"We are tired, your Excellency."

"Then rest. You have done half your work; now you must rest. Lieutenant Doronovitch—be seated, be seated—I congratulate you on receiving the St. George's Cross."

"I do not deserve it, General."

"How is that?"

"And the ditch——"

"Well, my dear fellow, you fought to-day to make me forget twenty ditches. Thank you, my men, once more. There is the sun too coming. Flags on the ramparts!" he shouted.

The dead redoubt seemed to grow alive at once. Two battalion-standards were planted on the ramparts. The first rays of sun that shone that day were re-

flected against the golden crosses which surmounted them. A slight breeze began to blow, and the standards opened out before the wind like the sails of a ship. The redoubt alone and its flags were lighted up by the sun ; around, everything was still covered in the mist. The little clump of ground looked like a ship on the ocean amidst the surrounding darkness.

Our expiring soldiers could see the Russian flag waving over the redoubt in their painful dying agonies. Floating on the ramparts, these flags seemed to call down a blessing from heaven on this world of misery and pain.

“Major Gortaloff, you will remain here as commandant of the redoubt,” said Skobelev, addressing a stout officer. “Can I depend on you? You must remain in this position at any price.”

“Remain or die, your Excellency !”

“Possibly I shall be unable to send you reinforcements. Give me your word that you will not leave the redoubt. This is the key to the enemy’s position. Over there,” and the General smiled sadly, “in the rear they do not see this yet. I am going to convince them. Give me your word that you will not leave the redoubt.”

“My honour is my pledge. I will not leave this alive.”

And Gortaloff raised his hand as though he was taking an oath.

Skobelev embraced him.

“God help you! Remember, my men, there will

be no reinforcements. Count only on yourselves. Farewell, heroes!"

Having ridden off about a quarter of a mile, the General turned round and looked back at the redoubt. It stood on a hill; the two flags floated proudly in the sunlight over the earthworks. The fog had not yet covered them.

"Consecrated to death!" he exclaimed, and his face grew even sadder as he took a last parting glance at the best troops in his division.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THEN we are quite deserted! They will give us nobody and nothing to help us! And this when everything has been nearly done," said General Skobeleff.

"Nothing and nobody," replied a smart aide-de-camp of the general staff.

"This will be the third Plevna, then."

The General's face twitched nervously, his voice broke down, and suddenly this man of iron, who had during the last thirty hours borne everything calmly—the destruction of his finest regiments, the death of his best friends, and the tragic changes of the fortunes of war from defeat to victory, and from victory again to defeat—leant on his saddle and burst into tears. His surrounderers rode off a few paces.

"What is the matter with him?" asked he of the staff.

Skobeleff's aide-de-camp looked at the neat and dandified figure of his interlocutor, his smart saddle and placid face, and contemptuously turned his back on him.

"Nothing—not even a single brigade! Why, that is the key to the position. If we can but establish ourselves there, Osman will retreat."

"Not a single regiment can be spared."

"And over there?" Skobelev asked, pointing in a north-easterly direction.

"They are guarding the road to Sistovo."

"Academic strategists!" exclaimed the aide-de-camp.

"Kriloff alone is an honest soul. If it had not been for his Shouysky Regiment I would have been unable to save those who are now defending, one against a hundred, *my own* redoubts. One against a hundred! Lions! How many heroes! And they must all die!" He raised himself in his saddle and took off his cap. "Do you hear?" he exclaimed, as he waved it in the direction of the redoubts.

The firing was growing so hot over there, that it seemed, in the rattle of musketry and roar of guns never ceasing for an instant, that all the firm forts guarding Plevna were doomed to tumble to pieces. The outlines of the redoubts, visible in the grey sky but a short time ago, were now completely enveloped in dark clouds of gunpowder smoke. In those clouds lions were dying; in those clouds hordes upon hordes of Turks were sweeping down on the remnants of those heroic companies who had been so well-tried in action, and who cared not for help. But the noise of the slaughter, the terrible screams of the assailants, responsive shouts of defiance of the defenders—this was all that could be heard of the battle. The eye could see nothing. King Death seemed to be feasting in

that hellish atmosphere, and was eagerly calling for more victims.

“Do you hear them? Men have fought, and will fight again, but not such men. They will remain on the field; they gave their word, and they will die. Do you hear? They are but a handful, and what a cheer! In the very face of the enemy, surrounded on every side. Crushed! Well, what is to be done? They have done all they could; they have accomplished impossible feats; they can do no more. Gentlemen,”—his voice quivered again. There was a pause. Everyone held his breath—“gentlemen, we will retreat; we will return the Turks what we have taken. To-day is a day of triumph for our enemies; it is also a glorious day for us. My men will not blush when they remember the 30th of August.* Gentlemen, we shall retreat. The Shouysky Regiment will cover our retreat. Forward, and quickly!”

His spurs tore the flanks of his magnificent steed, which threw itself across the uneven and muddy ground at full speed. The wind whistled past his ear, and so did the bullets. The riders galloped on madly, as though the lives of dearly-beloved friends were depending on every instant. The young aide-de-camp from the staff was thrown from his horse, but nobody waited for him, there was no time. The next minute he was riding alone, trying to overtake the General. The blood was flowing from the bitten lips of the latter, his eyes were looking hopelessly in front, and—could see nothing;

* Old style. The 11th of September, new style.

he still held his cap in his hand, and his hair had gummed itself to his head and lay in wavy curls round his forehead and temples. The young aide-de-camp of the general staff, hurrying after the General, kept politely bowing to every bullet that passed him, showing thereby a remarkably elastic and flexible neck, which his companions, had they cared to watch him, would of course, have greatly admired.

“There they are—there they are!” shouted the General, stretching out his arm. “There they are; do you see them?”

Looming through the fog, the indefinite outlines of the redoubt could be distinguished. It was indefinite because it was piled up with human bodies. Enraged hordes of Turks climbing up its ramparts, on which stood our men defending it with their bayonets. Masses of fresh Turkish troops could be dimly descried, approaching, but only for a moment. Soon fresh clouds of smoke hid the terrific battle-picture from view, and the riders could again only hear and could no more see.

“Is the Shouysky Regiment coming?” the General asked.

“It is ready and on the march.”

And again the mad gallop was resumed, and again the brave steed seemed to be racing the wind.

In the redoubt, meantime, the last scene of this tragedy was being enacted. They defended themselves with their bayonets. Standing on the ramparts they could see, both to rear and in front of them, nothing but masses of enemies. The Turks were also crowding up on the left. It seemed as though the gallant ship

redoubt was fast sinking with but a few remaining hands left of what was once a large and manly crew. The ravines and hills around were covered with Turks. The ravening Turks were creeping up on every side. There could be no doubt as to the victory. The dying lions began to despair of defence. They knew that their position must fall into the hated hands of the enemy, and were only concerned to die with honour, to give the hardest possible blows in their last moments, and sell their lives as dearly as they could. Into one part of the redoubt the Turks had already broken and were fighting hand to hand with our men, smothering them with their numbers, dying only to be replaced by fresh hordes, who in their turn had others waiting to take their place. The shower of bullets meant death to friend and foe. Having broken their bayonets, the enemies resorted to nature's weapons, and, choking with rage, tried to strangle each other, grasped each other's throats, pressed out each other's eyes, tore open each other's mouths. Often a dying soldier, having thrown down his foe with his last remaining strength, would fasten his teeth into his flesh, and could not be induced to relax his hold till a blow from the butt-end of a musket laid open his skull and finally put out the last spark of life. Parfenoff stood up at full length, keeping several doughty Turks at bay with his bayonet. The snub-nosed yokel, his face cut to pieces, had shut his eyes and was swinging the butt-end of his musket from right to left with deadly effect, not knowing whom he was knocking down, nor whose skull was cracking under his blows. Gortaloff, sad and silent, sat, meanwhile, his

arms crossed, in the centre of the redoubt. He was ready—that ship's captain—he was prepared for death; but his hour had not yet come, and he was calmly waiting for the final shock from those fatal waves. Grenades exploded amongst the live mass of men. Here and there a parallel trench had been seized by the Turks, and in those narrow ditches the most fierce and sanguinary combat was going on. The foes seized each other and perished together, enriching the soil with their blood. They grasped each other in the dark, dense smoke and fog, and could not even distinguish the break of the cold grey autumn day.

The orderlies sent off could not approach the redoubt, it was so completely surrounded by Turks. They made signals, but the valorous defenders, determined to die, would not trust them. From the redoubt on the left, however, (Abud-beg-tabi,) a handful of men moved out to meet their friends; but at first all who threw themselves into the thick crowd of their surrounding enemies fell instantly under the bayonet. The wounded, once fallen, could no longer hope to be saved, and those who had no wounds could not move on; and, of course, there was no one to carry them. Many had not even to wait for the Turks, but were trampled to death by their own comrades. Wherever the attack was most desperate, wherever the Turks' shouts of triumph were loudest, handfuls of defenders rushed to push them back. They had no time to see whom they were trampling on. "O God! save us! Throw me somewhere into a corner. Oh! you are a comrade, too!" could be heard hoarsely re-echoed on every side; but

their voices were not traceable to their owners in that kingdom of death and triumph of terror. Not only their hands and feet were in blood, their legs were completely covered with it. Where there were no killed and wounded on the ground there were pools of blood. Men were continually stumbling and falling into, and scrambling out of, these pools. Often some poor fellow, beside himself with pain, would catch hold of the feet or mantle of passing comrades and cling to them; but these would tear themselves away without looking round; then there was no help. Besides, those who were not yet wounded knew their turn would soon come, and that they themselves would soon be lying on the ground and scratching the earth in the fierce anguish of their death agonies.

Kharaboff noticed on his left hand an unoccupied streak along the ridge of the hill. Here the Turks separated, attacking us in the front and rear.

"Will you order me to lead the men off along there?" he said, turning to Gortaloff.

"What do you say?" the major asked, looking at him reflectively.

Kharaboff repeated his question.

"Wait. We must save the flags too. In any case they must not fall into the enemy's hands. What was that? From whence came those shots?"

For a moment hope had returned. Gortaloff rose.

"Can it be reinforcements? Can you make out what it is?"

"No;—yes, I can, though. It is Skobelev. Only he has no more than a battalion with him."

“But the guns, the guns! where are they from?”

“I can hear them. There! they have opened fire again. One battery only. I think he wants to cover our retreat. With so small a force the Turks cannot be beaten off.”

Gortaloff looked intently in the direction, and then, without saying a word, went down. There was no hope. The Turks had again stopped their attack, but there was no hope. His hour, which he had been waiting for, had come. This hour had to be taken advantage of, whatever it might cost. The Turks had fallen back, and left the rear open. Now the garrison of the redoubt might escape. Now was the time for retreat. For the last time he gathered his men around him, and looked into their faces attentively and long. Those dear, friendly faces, which he would never see again. There they were before him, awaiting his orders, looking straight into his face. And there were their flags waving over them.

“Comrades, go! Make a way for yourselves with your bayonets. This place can no longer be held, Lieutenant-captain Abayceef, you will lead them. God bless you, my children. Farewell!”

And, baring his head, Gortaloff reverently made the sign of the cross over his men.

“And now, in God’s name!” he said loudly, having regained his self-command.

“And you?” they all exclaimed, their eyes turned on him with an expression of sadness and pain.

“I—I remain—I remain with these,” he said, pointing to the dead bodies strewn on the ground. Tell the

General that I have kept my word. I have not left the redoubt. Tell him that I am here, dead! Good-bye, children!"

Then they went marching towards the hill. There they went up it. There went their grey figures. They were no more in the redoubt. Soon the ship will sink. The crew had taken to the boats and rowed off; the captain alone remains.

He waved them his last farewell.

"God bless you! God bless you!" he cried.

And with tears in his eyes he saw how the last soldiers turned round and made the sign of the cross over him. He could no longer suppress his sobs. The wounded turned and writhed; they, too, had been left behind. Then the flags disappeared in the distance. "Farewell, comrades, farewell! It is time. It is time. The Turks should not see these tears." There they were coming, running along. They had smelt that the redoubt was deserted. The fierce crowd gave a loud triumphant roar. The roar was coming towards him. The herd of wild beasts was rushing towards him; the hurricane was approaching. It was time! Calm and stately, with his hands crossed on his breast, he slowly descended to the last breastwork. Gortaloff was now guarding the redoubt alone. Alone, and not the slightest emotion could now be discerned on the face of the captain who would not desert his sinking ship. How many of them! There they were at his very feet. Bayonets—they came rushing up the ramparts.

Single-handed Gortaloff fought these swarms. He sent his last sigh to heaven—and the torn pieces of the

hero's body were lying about on the blood-bespattered ground.

The fire of the Shouysky Regiment from the adjacent hill forced the Turks to retreat.

For some time the road was clear for retreat. There was as yet no need for bayonets. The Turks took a pleasure in firing on the retreating Russians at a distance. But the men kept their close formation nevertheless. They did not like to adopt the extended order. Shoulder to shoulder they marched resolutely and evenly on. Had it not been for the blood on their hands and faces, had it not been for the occasional occurrence of wounded men among that mass of slowly-moving soldiers, who were carried by their comrades on crossed muskets, or were painfully dragging themselves along, leaning on their bayonets for support, one might have supposed that this was a body of fresh troops, marching quietly along amidst the ordinary circumstances of a campaign. They even kept their distances, these glorious remnants of heroic regiments who had just come out of a fierce battle of thirty hours' duration. Their savagely contracted faces, their eyes burning with feverish brilliancy, alone betrayed the agitation in the hearts of these last defenders of the redoubt. Their torn flags waved gently over their silent ranks. A few Turkish standards, mounted with gold crescents, unfolded their flags with the name of Allah on them, and rustled in the wind with the others. These latter seemed to testify that the soldiers carrying them off had suffered a defeat which was nevertheless more glorious than any victory. The

retreating troops carried off their trophies with them. They had not only preserved their own colours, they had captured those of the enemy too. But no, they had left behind them what they could not have carried away. Our gun remained in the redoubt. The lock was detached, and several men tried to drag it along.

“What a pity!” some of the men exclaimed. “We have left our gun behind us!”

“Never mind. It is of no use without its lock! We could not drag it along ourselves. It must remain. Let the Pig’s-ears* have it. We can’t do anything with it.”

“It stands proudly, our gun! Look how it turns up its nose, as proudly as our General! We could not get it away even with bulls,” they said.

Turning round they saw Gortaloff standing calmly on the ramparts. They saw his frank and open countenance turned bravely in the direction from whence his death was surely and inevitably coming. They saw how a crowd seemed suddenly to grow round him—how that defenceless man, who had lowered his sword to them and was standing with arms folded on his breast, was being lifted up on their bayonets. They could see how he struggled on the cold, sharp steel, how he was thrown down. They could see how the dark waves of Turkish hordes passed over the corpse of that last defender of the redoubt, and climbed the ramparts.

* Mussalmans are forbidden to eat the ears of pork, and are consequently called “Pig’s-ears” in Russia.

The tumult and triumph of the victors, however, did not drown the groans and shrieks of those wounded who were so unfortunate as to fall into their hands. They were desperate cries, cries that pierced the heart. The generous foe did not like to leave the dying to their anguish,—they would not let them die in peace. All their hate and all their powers of invention were directed towards devising tortures, for which there are no words in the language of humanity. The countenances of our men grew still more gloomy as they heard the groans of their dying comrades. They sent the barbarians their maledictions. They forgot the pain of their own wounds. Several even burst into tears; and it was likely that this handful of wearied and bleeding warriors, would have rushed back upon their foe, and tried to revenge and save their companions. But what could a few hundreds, all that remained of those decimated regiments, what could a few hundreds do against tens upon tens of hordes of Turks, rushing on the redoubt from all directions? They could but have sacrificed themselves, and added their number to the victims of these herds of hyænas, who rejoiced over the agonies of the martyred Russians, too feeble even to lift up their arms to ward off the blows from those vile yataghans. They could not turn away when the triumphant victors built up fires on their bleeding breasts. They could but cry out in anguish into that cold indifferent sky, when their wearied pain-stricken bodies were tattooed with the sign of the cross, when the regular troops of Turkey, with malevolent pleasure slowly carved off their hands and feet, bit by bit. Happy

were they who died from loss of blood, who found a speedy end to their sufferings.

The Shouysky Regiment stood firmly under a cruel fire, covering the retreat of the retiring forces, but their fate was not so terrible. Falling, they knew that the enemy could not approach them; they knew that their death would not be hastened by terrible tortures. These died comparatively calmly. Seeing how nobly the last remnants of what were but yesterday fine and strong regiments were marching towards them from the redoubt, they stood erect under the shower of bullets; no one dreamed of hiding in the ravine. Skobelev looked attentively on the retreating troops, and eagerly counted their ranks in the distance. - He seemed still to hope that the losses might not prove so very great after all, that the regiments had got mixed up, and that more men would follow. But alas! The dark mass drew nearer and nearer, and no fresh masses followed them, there were none but the wounded and dying in their rear, and these were stretched on the hill and its ridge. Some of these wounded crept after them, not having lost all their strength in their pain and terror; but others remained where they were, and, turning their faces down on the ground, lay motionless, as though they endeavoured not to hear and see what awaited them as soon as their comrades had left them entirely.

"How few, how few!" Skobelev exclaimed, nervously. "What a dreadful day! And how they retreat! No confusion! No disorder! Those are men! Send me a Cossack!"

A dried-up Cossack on a dried-up horse rode up to the General.

"Do you know where General Kriloff is stationed? I think I have sent you once before! You will go there again immediately."

The Cossack, who had been there and back twice that day, only sighed and mentally murmured the proverb, "A Cossack's lot—a dog's life!"

Skobelev nervously jotted down a few sentences on a slip of paper.

"Have been beaten out of the redoubt. Am retreating in order, covered by your Shouysky Regiment. Thank you, General!"

"Give this note to the General. And be quick!"

"If Kriloff had literally obeyed his orders, and refused to send you any assistance, nobody would have left those redoubts alive. The academic strategists might reflect a little over that," an aide-de-camp observed.

Skobelev only pulled his whiskers, and looked more intently on his retreating men.

"How many losses! How many losses!" he exclaimed.

"The Shouyskys have been pretty well pickled too. They were sent on here after coming out of action. They had not half their numbers, and now they will lose the remainder."

"A dreadful day! And why did they hold back? What were they waiting for?"

Everyone surrounding the General seemed to have become enervated and weakened—the mind refused to

work; the senses seemed to have got deadened. Round about lay the bodies of the dead, and fresh wounded were continually falling down and adding to the number. But it seemed to enter nobody's brain to go away. Everyone seemed to be indifferent. Greater courage and energy seemed requisite to retire than to remain where they were, without moving, as though they had been petrified.

Grivitza sleeps, Toutchenitza sleeps, Radishevo sleeps. There is the Turkish redoubt, occupied by us, the only trophy of our two days' stubborn combat. There are the camp-kettles, behind which sit Roumanian soldiers looking into the fire. Far around them there are mountains of piled bodies; blood is everywhere; on the ramparts, and under their feet, its sharp odour strikes the nose. Drippings from the kettles fall into these dark pools and make a hissing noise, raising a disgusting sour vapour. The outpost sentries alone keep marching up and down boldly. They had been pushed out to the front to see if the enemy was showing himself. Was that anything? But no. The night is almost dead, and nothing but the screams of the ravens, joyously and triumphantly, resound through it. Nevertheless it was something. Was it but the fancy of their excited brains? Did those sounds take rise in morbid imagination? The sentry hears them, however, and soon knows how to account for them. How was it possible not to know what they meant? There was so much terror in those cries, so much suffering in those dying groans. The cold sweat stands

on our brows, our hearts beat more slowly, our feet tremble under us. Those are they who have been left behind. They are those who are lying about on the field between us and the enemy. Those are the voices of the ravens' live food. The poor fellows know their fate, and, not having the strength to crawl away, they fill the scene of the late battle with their groans and prayers. Woe to the conquered, woe! "Show them no mercy!" the barbarians are heard to cry as they swoop down with triumphant yells on the deserted field, and descend on their victims.

And the silence which followed seemed still more painful and sad on our lines.

On the ridge, behind the chain of the Green Mountains, stood a kettle. The fire had gone out, the red coals only occasionally twinkled underneath. Silently looking into the dying embers sat Skobelev. He could not sleep. The recollection of that dreadful day was always before him. The military enthusiast was beginning to curse war. Why had not he been killed? Why was he left alive to bury his finest regiments? And the bitter consciousness of the uselessness of these losses tormented his heart, and he turned cold when he remembered the particular men he had lost that day. How they had fought! With what a faith in him they had gone to their death! They had gone, and would not return! Had he perhaps been mistaken in his calculations? The horrid doubt passed over him that, perhaps, all these sufferings were owing to his negligence and rashness. And again he went over the thirty hours of that uninterrupted fight; and again he bitterly cursed

the incapacity of those, thanks to whom all these sacrifices had been made in vain and that had been lost which would have compensated for the bloodshed, namely, a crown of victory! And where were his old friends who were yesterday still well and cheerful? All were dead. There were thousands of killed and wounded. And why? To whom were these deaths useful? And he wrapped himself more closely in his soldier's mantle, as though he was chilled by these recollections, whilst the sad and gentle stars seemed to shine down reproachfully on him from out that dark, calm, and indifferent sky. He covered his eyes, wishing to avoid even the faces of the sleeping men. But the voice of conscience seemed to call still louder in his bosom, like the voice that tormented Cain. He felt as though a cold dead hand was placed on his breast, had seized his heart, and was mercilessly squeezing it. "No, you shall never forget this day! Never. The tumults of war may cease, but whenever you are alone I will come to you and will remind you of it," that hand seemed to say. He felt that even in his moments of greatest triumph those quiet stars would look down upon him sadly and reproachfully, that cold hand would grasp and press his heart as now.

A wounded soldier passed by. He felt cold, he saw the dying embers. The wounded man crawled up. He saw some officer or other sitting there. What did he care? After such a battle, was he to be afraid of officers?

"Make room for me, comrade, let me warm myself," he exclaimed, careless who the officer might be. He drew near the fire, and stirred it up. Perhaps he was

going to die immediately. His heart was heavy, his buoyancy was gone, he was weary.

"And there is little fire too!" he murmured gloomily. "They did not know how to lay it. Heigho! What a lot it is, the soldier's!"

The General regarded him. A deep red scar was on his forehead, blood streamed from his shoulder, his foot was also covered with blood.

"Where were you wounded?" he asked gently; "in the redoubt?"

"Wounded? Much do you care? It was in the rear that I got them." He did not see it was his own General, so inflamed were his eyes.

Skobeleff looked at the embers silently. He did not even hear the man's answer.

"Wounded! They are all wounded! They cannot be counted!" said the soldier moodily. "They are scattered about. There are thousands of them!"

"Yes, they cannot be counted! You led them to their death! Where are they? What had they done that they should pay for the idea you serve? Indispensable victories! And to whom are they indispensable? To you and such as you. Indispensable to the soldier?" the voice within again whispered to him.

He had nearly forgotten where he was, and was stretching himself out, when he felt something. Somebody was pulling off his cloak.

"What do you want?" he exclaimed.

"You are well. I want it," the soldier replied still more morosely, and pulled the cloak off, wrapped himself in it, and went on his way.

The General followed him mechanically with his eyes, until the figure was lost in the darkness, and again he looked silently into the embers, fast dying out, and again those terrible thoughts. Oh! how those ravens screamed! They were gnawing away at his heart, those thoughts—someone seemed to be threatening him.

Far away in the distance he could hear music! Who was it that could hold high festival? Probably jovial souls were supping over there. It was strange how those tunes fitted with the ravens' cawings. They were both greedy sounds, and mercilessly sarcastic. He thought he could hear the clang of glass, and the sound of genial conversation. There were ravens everywhere! Meanwhile the fire had quite gone out. Oh, if he could but go to sleep too! If those terrible thoughts of that dread cold hand would but depart! Why did not the clouds cover, if but for a minute, those gentle reproachful stars?

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER the third battle of Plevna, Skobelev went to Bukharest to pull himself together, and to restore his shattered nerves. His holiday was a very peculiar one, however. He did not leave his studies and his books. The Roumanians, who met him frequently at the restaurants of Broft and Hugo, drinking his wine, soon learned to like him, the Roumanian ladies still more. From these there was no refuge. He was continually receiving billet-doux from the lionesses of Bukharest appointing a rendezvous. But these notes were regularly burned without any further results. Sometimes he had almost to shut himself up from these ladies.

“One must flee ladies—yes, *ladies!*” he would say. “The soldier should avoid them, or else he might get attached to one, and man cannot serve two masters; there is not room in his heart for it. War and the family are incompatible!”

The following comical misunderstanding which took place has impressed itself on our memory, and is perhaps worthy of repetition. A young and fascinating

Wallachian lady, very eccentric besides, hearing of Skobelev's arrival at Bukharest, and having been told all manner of miraculous stories about him, came here on purpose to see him. Skobelev received a most extraordinary letter from her, in which she informed him of her intention of calling on him the next day to pay him a personal tribute of admiration. The letter was committed to the flames, as usual, and the lady was completely forgotten. The following day General S——, a very infirm old man, paid Skobelev a visit. This general was a very tiresome old officer, who bored Skobelev with a full account of all the campaigns he had gone through, commencing almost with the century, and finishing with the Crimea. Suddenly a footman announced a lady.

“Who is she !” Skobelev inquired.

The man handed her card to him, and Skobelev recognised the name of the lady who had written to him the day before. He was very much displeased. This sort of thing was so very monotonous and wearying ; but fortunately, he at once conceived a brilliant idea, by which he would get rid of his tedious guest and his Roumanian beauty at one and the same time. Knowing the weakness of his guest, he turned to him and said :

“Help me out of this difficulty, your Excellency. A lady wants to see me. I have no time. Will you receive her for me? She has never seen me. Tell her whatever you like ; say, for fun, that you are Skobelev.”

S—— smiled. The idea pleased him immensely.

"If you don't mind, I will assume your character," he replied, and went out, whilst Skobelev shut himself up and resumed his studies.

The general afterwards told Skobelev the result of the adventure.

"What a little fool!" he exclaimed. "A conceited thing. I have seen prettier ones than that in Hungary, in the '48. What did she think of herself? There was nothing so very wonderful about her. I knew a girl at Szegedin—oh! such a girl!"

"Well, what did she do?"

"She looked at me, burst out laughing, and went away. She kept muttering something in her own language, but I did not understand her. A magpie!"

The lady's version of the interview, which Skobelev heard later, was equally amusing.

"You Russians have strange ideas of youth," she said to General Tcherkessoff.

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, Skobelev is a young general, according to you. Well, I saw him. He is an old baboon, and a baboon, too, who has lost his hair. A strange youth. I should like to see whom they would call old."

Notwithstanding these amenities, Skobelev was completely crushed with the impression of the 30th August (11th September).

"It is always before me," he said. "I cannot forget it. I drink, and drink, but it grows up before me again. I see that breastwork of dead bodies, Gortaloff thrown into the air on the points of the Turkish bayonets. Oh, dreadful! I am not at all sentimental,

you know. I saw the necessity and the possibility of fighting that battle. But still—and it was not my fault—nevertheless I can't sleep. I always see before me the retreat from the redoubt, and those screams still ring in my ears. No, this is a bad rest. I shall forget more easily when at my duties; but here the recollection of that terrible day torments me." He had grown thin and yellow during his sojourn at Bukharest. "This is a bad relaxation. I must return to my work," he said; "then I shall forget these things sooner, but here those terrible impressions torment me."

While Skobeleff was at Bukharest, Todleben arrived. On his way across the Danube he stopped here for a few days. He grew very intimate with Skobeleff; for a time they were almost inseparable companions, and dined and supped together. They had one thing in common—they were bold and accustomed to a military life. They were both equally suspicious of civilian generals, and despised those peaceful heroes who, wearing the military uniform, appeared nevertheless on the field of battle as innocent as children and as harmless as doves. Unfortunately, these two fighting giants, Todleben and Skobeleff, did not remain united long; their natures were too different, their views of war and soldiers too unlike. The one was all caution, even slow, calm, and always had his plans well prepared beforehand. The other was an eagle swooping down on the enemy, full of resource, talented, capable, even in the very thick of the battle, of changing his plan and creating an entirely new disposition, nervous, avidious of strong

excitement. Of course, Skobelev was the favourite of the army, though the other rendered much greater service at Plevna. Later, at Geok Teppé, Skobelev was different himself. With years had come judgment, and the poet of war had also become its mathematician. It was only towards his end that the real Skobelev came out, and we would have seen him in his full development in the next great war. Till 1880 he was only growing and developing; till then all his brilliant qualities had been but as sparks of his genius, separate rays of that bright war-star, which rose so suddenly only immediately to disappear again.

One had to see the reception which the men who had been wounded on the 30th of August gave him at Bukharest to understand how well soldiers can distinguish friends from enemies. He was as popular with the officers. One day, at Broft's restaurant, a young aide-de-camp of the general staff, blessed with plenty of patronage, and consequently with a brilliant career before him, commenced speaking of the General in that contemptuous and flippant manner which, for some reason or other, we regard as a sign of independence of mind, and even as an indispensable trait of good breeding. He talked and talked, and completely forgot himself. Suddenly an officer of the line, with his arm in a sling, exclaimed:

"Silence, Sirrah! hold your tongue! When you wear the orders that we have earned, when you skim the cream of everything, when you enjoy all the advantages of an action whilst we have to endure nothing but the hardships and responsibility, we do not rebuke you, we do not interfere, we do not envy you your

quarters. But leave Skobelev alone! Do you hear, Sirrah?—leave him alone!”

The aide-de-camp got quite confused, and begged pardon.

“Why, they are fanatics, these men!” he told his friends. “They will not even let one speak.”

He misunderstood them; it was slander they set their faces against.

“Who has lost more men than Skobelev?” another officer once remarked. This was before the freezing of the 24th Division at Shipka, before Gorny Doubnyak, before the passage of the Balkans by the Guards.

“Yes; but then no one has such difficult tasks allotted to him, tasks which are so difficult to accomplish, and which cost such enormous sacrifices.”

The love his soldiers bore him was unprecedented.

As Skobelev was riding one day, attended by an orderly, he met a transport-cart full of wounded. Wishing to let the mutilated and dying soldiers reach their destination as rapidly and with as little delay as possible, he stopped his horse to let them pass.

“Skobelev! Skobelev!” shouted some of the men, and suddenly that cart, in which the poor fellows were packed like cattle, where they were struggling in the most terrible and inhuman agony, resounded with a loud and hearty cheer. The others followed suit. And what a cheer it was! It came from breasts pierced with bullets; it was uttered by lips twitching in their last moments, and covered with clotted blood.

After a reconnoitre Skobelev met a soldier wounded in the head and chest. One ball had entered his skull

the other was under his left shoulder. He could hardly drag himself along. Seeing the General, he pulled himself up and presented arms; a characteristic demonstration of a soldier's enthusiasm.

A wounded officer was brought to a bandaging station. The doctor examined him. There was nothing to be done; his speedy end was inevitable.

"I say," the unfortunate demanded, "how long have I got to live?"

"A mere trifling wound," the doctor began in the usual way.

"Don't talk like that. I am no child; it is no use trying to comfort me. I know my fate very well. I am all alone; there is no one to cry for me. Tell me the truth, how many hours have I to live?"

"Two; perhaps three. Can I do anything for you?"

"Well, is Skobelev far off?"

"No; about two hundred paces."

"Tell him that a dying man wants to see him."

Skobelev put spurs into his horse, and was soon by his side. The officer's eyes, however, were getting very dim.

"How misty everything is! Is the General here? I cannot see him."

"I am here; what do you want?"

"For the last time, General, squeeze my hand. Yes, like that; thank you!"

"Well, how are our fellows?" a dying officer asked at Plevna, raising himself painfully and slowly.

"They are retreating."

“Not strong enough?”

“No; there are clouds upon clouds of Turks on all sides.”

“Is Skobelev untouched?”

“He is alive.”

“Thank God! all is not yet lost! God grant him——” and turning round, he fell down and died with his blessing on his lips.

At the battle of Plevna, when Skobelev was leading his men into the fire for the fifth time, he was surrounded by his soldiers, who stopped him.

“Your Excellency!”

“What is it, my men?”

“You must not keep on horseback, all the others have dismounted.”

“All right,” and Skobelev galloped on.

The enemy fired on the rider, and sent a shower of bullets at him.

“Why should we stand on ceremony with him? Hey, my men! Dismount the General from his horse! If he remains on it he’ll get killed.”

And before Skobelev had time to look round he was lifted out of the saddle.

“We beg your pardon, your Excellency; but you forced us to do it!” they pleaded.

In the trenches, when Skobelev was standing on the breastwork, and the Turkish lines, from which the firing was continual, were about three hundred paces off, the men jumped up and stood by his side. The General, to prevent useless bloodshed, was obliged to take shelter.

A wounded soldier was to have both his legs amputated. He obstinately declined chloroform, and asked for nothing but a pipe. An enormous one was handed him. One leg was cut off—he did not moan once. They commenced the next; the soldier only took a stronger pull at his pipe. This was witnessed by some sisters of mercy, one of whom, a very young girl, could not control her feelings and broke into tears. She was told that by so doing she might have a bad effect on the wounded man.

“Let her be,” said the soldier, taking the pipe out of his mouth. “She’s a woman; let her cry.”

This observation was so unexpected that everybody smiled, notwithstanding the melancholy surroundings.

“Why wouldn’t you have any chloroform? You would not have felt the pain if you had.”

“We must not.”

“Why not? All the fellows do.”

“Others may, but we are Skobelev’s.”

A detachment of Cossacks was being relieved from duty, when one of the men pulled out his best uniform from his saddle-pockets (Cossacks carry all their worldly treasure in their saddle-pockets) and commenced putting it on.

“What are you doing that for? Why spoil your new coat?” his officer demanded.

“Why, Sir, the General says that everyone should go into action dressed in his best, as though he was going to take the Eucharist. He himself always puts new clothes on.”

In Skobelev’s division the men were not only

anxious to be brave, they also wished to be beautiful in battle.

The Cossack put on his new uniform and rode off, when a spent ball struck him in his stomach. Such wounds are always mortal, and excruciatingly painful. He was taken to the bandaging station, which the Commander-in-Chief was just then inspecting.

“Your honour,” said the trooper to an officer beside him, who was also wounded, “what am I to answer His Imperial Highness if he should ask me anything?”

Even the common soldiers paid attention to appearances.

Skobeleff always took the part of his men, and their hard lot always gave him great pain. Those youths of the line, who had such unswerving faith in action, who were so brave, had become a sort of family to the General,—dearer even, if you like.

“I will never desert them,” he used to say; “I have to answer for them all now. To work as they do is almost impossible.”

“But they will get more distinction too. They will have something to return home with.”

“Well, and those who do survive and go home—What will they receive? What future have they? Papas, mammas, and titled relations they have none. The luckiest will get a pension of about £40 a year and an appointment in the police—and what honest and talented youths they are!”

Indeed, the men under Skobeleff developed quite peculiar characteristics. One soldier, for instance, an

educated young man, would not pass the officer's examination. For what reason, do you suppose?

"Is it a disgrace to be a private soldier? I hold it to be a great honour," he would say; "and a private soldier I will remain."

Skobeleff's staff and secretariat was situated about a hundred paces from the enemy; the officers lived day and night in the trenches, the clerks were under fire!

Among the episodes that come to my mind relating to this period, the following seems worthy of recounting. I mean the case of young Ivantchenko. A year before the war he was but a boy of fifteen studying at a grammar-school at Moscow. But the Servian rising so kindled his ardour that he ran away from his Greek and Latin, and actually succeeded in crossing the Austrian frontier only to learn, at Lendburg, that the war was over. What was he to do? There was no going back, especially as his parents would give him anything but an affectionate welcome. Being only a boy, he turned his hands to agricultural labour, hired himself out, and earned his bread by the sweat of his brow. Then he went to Roumania and got into a village of Russian emigrants, where he was made school-master. He was given a hut, he was fed. Things went very well, till, at last, Ivantchenko was able to have a cart and horse of his own. Just then our war with Turkey commenced. Ivantchenko sold everything, sold his horse, sold his cart, and entered the Roumanian army as a volunteer. He saw some action there, but could not stand the service. The Roumanian officers were so brutal towards

their men, that our line officers were the ideal of politeness by comparison. Besides, as a volunteer, Ivantchenko received no food, but a franc a day—on paper, at least. Not wishing to starve he appeared before Skobelev.

“I want something to eat ; take me into your division.”

“No ; look here, I will give you the requisite money ; go home to your parents.”

“That means good-bye, then.”

“Why that ?”

“Because I want to fight even more badly than to eat ; and will therefore remain with the Roumanians.”

“What am I to do with you ?”

“Take me into your division.”

“But, you see, you belong to the Roumanian army.”

“Your Excellency need only wish, and the thing is done.”

So he was put into the Ouglitsky Regiment. Ivantchenko was inseparable from the men in the trenches, and marched against the Turks. In fact this classicist felt as happy as possible. He was very much liked and taken care of. After some time he again met Skobelev.

“I say, little one, I am going to send you home to your parents.”

“They won’t receive me.”

“I will provide you the means to pursue your studies, I will give you a scholarship.”

“But I would run away again. One does not become a Skobelev in grammar schools.”

And so Skobelev allowed him to remain through the campaign.

Once, as Skobelev was riding to Brestovetz, an officer came to meet him, fatigued and worn out.

"Your Excellency, I have been sent to you——"

"Have you dined?"

"No. I have been sent to you."

"Well, come and dine with me first."

"But I am quite untidy and ragged."

"Never mind, I do not have ladies to dinner."

While Skobelev was at Bukharest, and walking out one day, he overtook an officer, haggard, dusty, and very shabbily dressed.

"What is your regiment?"

The officer replied.

"What are you doing here, then?"

"I have come to dine. I have got quite starved at quarters."

"Where are you going to dine?"

"I don't know. Everything is so dear, quite forbidding! And, then, how am I to go in? I am ashamed to show myself in a decent restaurant."

"What are you ashamed of? Of your work and privations? Come with me!"

Skobelev took him by the arm to Broft's, introduced him to his friends, and treated him to a dinner.

When the officer returned, contented and happy, to his miserable little inn, he found a parcel awaiting him. It was accompanied by a letter, which ran as follows:

"You left behind you at dinner eight gold imperials

near your plate. You should not lose money. I send them herewith.—M. SKOBELEFF.”

The impression all this made on the young men can be easily understood. They could see that Skobelev repaid their love by attention. A small detail will illustrate his care and thoughtfulness. In Skobelev's trenches the men had orders not to rise when he passed. This vexed pedantic martinets. But Skobelev's explanation was simple.

“Men want rest. If they have to jump up, either their General must keep away and not live amongst his men, or else the soldier will remain in a state of constant fatigue.”

CHAPTER XVI.

IN the October of 1877 Skobeleff was at his duties again, and I met him at head-quarters.

"I have come to see the General," he said, nodding his head towards his father; and from this I gathered that the relations between father and son had again assumed a critical character.

"Yes, I came to see him, and regret it now. His Excellency is not in the best of tempers."

"All right, all right!" the father replied.

"You should treat your senior officers with more respect, General; you know very well that military discipline does not permit unnecessary remarks," the son answered, for he was now his father's senior in rank.

"Where is the General?" I inquired on arriving at Brestovetz a few days later.

"Do you see the firing on the left flank there?" a soldier asked me. "Well, that means that the General is reconnoitring."

The soldier was right. Our men were bombarding

Krishina. On the left flank Skobeleff could be seen dashing along on his white charger, inspecting the position. He was galloping in front of the chain of skirmishers and outposts, and quite indifferent to the hail-storm of shots which surrounded him. Suddenly he stopped about two hundred paces from the Turkish lines. His horse did not even move its ears. He was reconnoitring the Turkish position, while the shots were thundering at his ears.

"Why do you expose yourself thus wantonly?" an officer asked him reproachfully.

"I must let my men see, you know, that the Turks do not know how to fire!"

As a matter of fact he was reconnoitring, and, thanks to this method, he was always well acquainted with the enemy's dispositions, and knew his position as well as that of his own men.

"Akh Pasha," the White General, as the Turks called him, occupied a small mud-hut at Brestovetz. There he slept and worked. In the court of this hut he had erected a large tent, in which some forty or fifty officers used to dine with him daily. Skobeleff's hospitality knew no bounds.

"I am expecting bad news from head-quarters," he said as I entered. "I have succumbed to an impulse. You know an order has been issued that no one is to be let out of Plevna, either Turk or Bulgarian. The reason, of course, was to make the position of the besieged as awkward as possible. But some forty carts, full of wounded Christian women and children, have just driven out of Krishina. They were all half-starved. Well, I

was sorry for them. They sobbed and implored to be allowed to pass the iron ring which we have forged round Plevna."

"And you have, of course, let them go?"

"To all the four quarters of the globe! And now I am going to catch it."

"But nobody will know of it."

"Ha! I have reported it myself."

And this reminded me of a scene I had myself witnessed not so long ago. A poor old woman had succeeded in running away from Plevna, and sought refuge at the quarters of another general. She was, by his orders, chased back into the besieged town by Cossacks with whips!

I had not been here three days when an order arrived from head-quarters to occupy the first chain of the Zeleny Gory mountains, and to entrench ourselves there.

Preparations were commenced the next day. Muskets were cleaned, ammunition was brought up to the batteries. Entrenching tools were collected, and the men, as was the custom in Skobeleff's division, put on their best and newest uniforms and linen. Officers went among their men to prepare them for the somewhat unusual night-attack. Most of them were new hands, and caused considerable uneasiness. There was also a great deficiency in officers; for the vacancies caused by previous actions had been but insufficiently filled up. Wherewith, indeed, were the vacancies to be made good? Officers were not plentiful. This was especially discouraging. "Ah! where are those with

whom we took Lovetz and the Plevna redoubts?" Skobelev was continually repeating. The majority of them were lying dead in alien soil, others were enduring agonies in hospitals—but very few had returned. Either their wounds had not got healed, or their limbs had been amputated and they had been obliged to leave the service. Most of the officers, therefore, were newly joined; they were as yet untried; the few remaining old veterans were looked on with compassionate pity. They would be the first in the field, and naturally, therefore, the first to fall. An outsider would not have noticed any exceptional activity in the camp. The bands played all day as usual, and the Ouglitsky Regiment sent forth its songs into the grey, gloomy air from very early morning.

At four o'clock Skobelev rode out of Brestovetz, smartly dressed, fresh and even scented on that dull grey day. His graceful figure mounted on his white charger was well calculated to produce a strong impression. The fog was so dense that the trees a quarter of a mile off looked like black clumps, as though the fog had collected into still darker lumps there. At that moment Skobelev was a riddle to us. Was it possible that that iron bosom had no room for fear, for the anxiety which seemed to possess every soul before battle? I turned towards him and asked him the question point-blank.

"It is close, of course. Do not believe those who tell you otherwise. Do you know," he added, recalling a conversation he had had at dinner with Colonel Havlock, "now is not the time to judge, to criticise, or to

despair. You say that talented people should take care of their persons. But we must all die, and we will die with pleasure if we can save Russia from disgrace by so doing; if we can but keep high her standard! It is good to die for one's country; there is no pleasanter death."

In the dark fog we could descry some indistinct objects. Riding up, I discovered them to be military tents, and lumps of hay. In front of them, drawn up in battle order, stood the companies and battalions. One could only see the rearmost men, the others were lost in the fog. The weather was most favourable, our only fear was the possibility of losing our way. We could approach to within a hundred paces of the enemy without being seen, then give a cheer, and run twenty paces more before the Turks would have time to awake from their surprise and greet us with their volleys; and at eighty paces their balls would not be dangerous, they would fly over our heads and not injure us. The reserves would suffer more than the attacking forces. In front stood the volunteers. These had volunteered to be the first to throw themselves into the enemy's trenches and knock the Turks over with their bayonets, whilst supported by the advanced lines of skirmishers. Looking into the faces of those volunteers, those desperate men, one was surprised to see nothing so very desperate and warlike about them. They were simple, honest soldier's faces, some with a good-natured smile on them; all trusting and faithful. They drew themselves up and followed the General with their eyes. One of them, especially,

was very anxious to present a smart front, and this man was going, probably, to meet his death. Evidently he wanted to draw attention to his excellent carriage. Skobelev looked him in the face. The soldier was quite satisfied. The General rode along the ranks and chatted with the men. He did not harangue them or speechify, he merely chatted with them.

"Well, comrades, what do you say? Are we going to win to-day?"

"We will try to, your Excellency."

"You won't disgrace yourselves?"

"Why should we, your Excellency? We are glad to go."

"Remember one thing, my men. Don't tear along. We are not going to take a Plevna. We are only going to turn the Turks out of their trenches and take them. So trust to your formation, and settle down to your work."

"We'll try."

"That's right. Remember, this is not a matter of bravery so much as of discipline and obedience. When your officer commands 'halt,' you have got to halt, though you may want to pitch into the fellows ever so much. And as for the Turks, they are nothing to be afraid of."

"We are not afraid of them!"

"That's right, my men. Do you remember Lovetz, and how we thrashed them there?"

"Yes, your Excellency," resounded cheerfully through the ranks.

"Do you remember how we ran after them?"

"They ran in hordes," a smiling fellow replied.

"Were you with me there? You are one of the old ones, I suppose?"

"I was with your Excellency under Plevna, when we took those redoubts."

Skobelev sighed, and answered:

"Well, my men; you see what you have to do. The work will be hard. We have taken those Zeleny Gory once before, they were ours——"

"And they 'll be ours again!"

A conversation of a similar character was repeated at each battalion. Skobelev recognised his old companions in arms, talked over old attacks with them, and told the men what was expected of them.

"Do you know, I am very fidgety about the young soldiers," Skobelev said to his staff. "It is a very risky business. Night—fog! An old hand, if he is not used to this sort of thing, might lose his head here. I shall not remain with the reserves as I intended. I will lead them myself. Ah! if I had but my Turkestan army here! Do you remember Andijan, Makhram?"

His old comrades in arms exchanged meaning glances at the mention of those old familiar names, which seemed to conjure up before their minds a long series of reminiscences.

"Do you remember how they talked of us Turkestans at the beginning of this campaign? Me they did not even like to trust a battalion to; and our officers were all looked down upon; and they were the first to fall. Where are now all the Kalitins, Fedoroffs, Polikarpoffs,

and Popoffs? Some are at Eski-Zagra, some on the Balkans! But it was a fine time out there."

We met the Vladimirsky Regiment after riding another quarter of a mile. The regiment was drawn up in battle order, on the ridges of some ravines where the reserves were to remain. These dark masses grouped together looked very picturesque in the fog, as they stood there silent and imposing, careful not to betray their proximity to the enemy by a single sound. The Turks were not more than six hundred paces from us. We looked anxiously into that impenetrable fog, and waited with beating hearts for the first shot from some particularly watchful sentry, to be followed by the whole line of the Turkish trenches, which would become covered with the lightning of musket-fire and the hail of shot, when those crowds of steady, immovable soldiers would fall, with hollow groans, killed and wounded, on the ground. A Turkish patrol might come against us and give the alarm. But in a few minutes our presence would no longer be a secret to the enemy—the present splendid spectacle would change to a tragedy, and there would no longer be time to admire the scene. A long procession of litters would be seen slowly carrying the wounded back to the camp, and the last farewell cries of dying men would be drowned by the hoarse shouts of the attacking forces and the bloodthirsty roll of drums.

Skobelev stopped in front of his regiments, took off his cap, and crossed himself. The air seemed to rustle, and instantaneously officers and men were following his example. Each one said his prayers to himself, each

man for that brief moment looked into his own soul. Who can tell? perhaps soon many would, without having time to glance up to that grey clouded sky, fall mortally wounded to the ground. Even the foreigners present felt the solemnity of that moment and bared their heads like the rest. Rapidly a picture of what was now the distant past, presented itself to the mind—the home of childhood, dear friends and relations—but it was only for a moment.

“Close up there!” was half-muttered through the ranks, and soon the chain of skirmishers was spread out like a fan. The faces of the men no more showed any signs of sadness, no pensive melancholy. The officers’ eyes were bright with enthusiasm, the command was given in clear metallic sounded, and Skobelev was already far in advance; his handsome form could be descried in front of the skirmishers. He looked round, returned, and explained something to the men.

At that hour we again looked into the faces of those volunteers (forlorn hope), those men who had consciously dedicated their lives. We looked for fire, for enthusiasm. No such thing! The same honest, military, well-drilled faces, not an atom of expression. Some looked a little bewildered and care-worn, most of them seemed but to be awaiting the word of command, and were ready to carry it out as though on parade; there was not a single remarkable face; they looked as if they were marching to relieve the watch on sentry duty. And these were “volunteers.” What could have moved them to be the first to go into fire? what induced them to choose to be the first to receive the

volleys of the enemy and the points of the Turkish bayonets against their breasts ?

The chain moved slowly on. The general's figure grew more and more indistinct in the fog. Soon the outlines of the skirmishers were also hidden in the dark. Day was breaking, but the light was still wrestling with darkness.

Thank God ! the Turks had not heard our approach. There was hope, after all, that the affair might go off without great losses. But just at that moment the neighbourhood was roused by the report of an isolated sentinel's musket. A terrible moment of silence ensued ; our hearts beat violently. Another shot—from another direction this time,—a third,—but they were all from different sides. Now suddenly a rattling of musketry commenced on our right flank, but only on that one side. Our men did not reply. From the sound of the shots, and from the intervals between each, we could judge that the Turks did not yet know what was taking place, and were only rousing themselves and scenting the danger, as it were. The men seemed to be firing coolly, as though they did not wish to apprise the enemy of their whereabouts, but were rather shooting with a view of seeing what happened to their bullets, and were not decided where and for what reason they were firing.

Our men must have got very near. The shots continued to be but occasional.

“ Children, follow me ! ” shouted Skobelev's clear voice from somewhere in the fog. It was drowned in the cheer which followed it, in the roar of the drums,

and the general din of the attack, and the deafening volleys of the enemy, which seemed to have suddenly sprung into existence. Again, then, he led his men personally against the foe, voluntarily exposing himself to the first bullet, and running the imminent risk of being the first to fall ! We could see nothing, but the first volley had already reached the reserves, and a thick hail of bullets descended over their heads. A few groans died away in the terrific tumult of that attack. We gave our horses to some Cossacks to hold, and moved towards the front. There was nothing to see on our way. Bullets whistled past us, and the distant roar of the attack was just audible. Then, something was clearly discernible in the fog. It came nearer and nearer. A man, wounded in the leg, was slowly dragging himself to the rear, leaning on his gun. Somebody else was crawling on the ground.

“ Where is Skobelev ? ”

“ Where ? He is at the front, leading the men, climbing into the enemy’s position. He does not care ; he fears nothing.”

And every now and again we could hear the encouraging voice of Skobelev, distinctly audible through the din and crash, like the scream of an eagle soaring above.

“ Where is the artillery ? ” a voice in the fog was heard asking. “ Where the devil is the artillery ? Give me an answer, somebody ! How am I to get to the batteries ? ” A rider darted past us, and was lost to the eyes the next minute. The order had been

given for the artillery to come up and play upon the Turks.

The chain of skirmishers had done their duty; the enemy's outposts had been dislodged and beaten back. They could hardly be distinguished in the darkness. It might be said that our men felt their way along. When all had been surrounded, it was discovered that a central outpost had been overlooked, and from this post the Turks were falling back on their main body. Had our small forlorn hope with its detachment of reserves been at all behindhand, the affair would have cost us dear. Fortunately, as soon as the lodgments of the outposts were seized by the skirmishers, parties of volunteers moved up under Skobelev's leadership, followed closely by their reserves. There were about fifty men in each detachment. It is difficult to imagine how frequently Skobelev's great deeds were accomplished with insignificant numbers. Of a hundred men moving on towards the enemy's trenches, about twenty followed at the heels of the retreating outposts. These were the most determined. About thirty more moved after them at a short distance, thinking it dishonourable to forsake their comrades. But full a half remained in the open between the outpost lodgments and the trenches. They lay down and kept quiet. Under such circumstances men get foolish. It is much more dangerous to lie down than to march on. My practical experience of war has convinced me that the greatest danger to the attacking force is when it is three hundred paces from the enemy and further. On getting nearer the danger decreases. Bullets fly in

heaps about the advancing troops, but always over their heads ; they only hear their buzzing, whizzing hisses, but they need not even duck down. One or two fellows may get accidentally wounded. This was well known, this had been seen and experienced, and yet the cowards lay down where the bullets fell, and had not the courage to march on to where they were less dangerous. It was simply a panic ; the men had lost their heads. The forlorn hope rushed into the enemy's trenches, and in the first instant turned the Turks out with one hearty cheer. Those who remained were bayoneted, for it would have been dangerous to make prisoners, having our weakness in numbers in view. Then the fellows who had remained behind jumped up, and opened fire on the enemy, who were running in all directions. Single volleys were followed by discharges from the whole force. The others soon got into the spirit of it. A panic, as is well known, disappears as quickly as it comes. Amongst the men who but a minute before were lying down far behind their comrades, there proved to be fine fellows. They ran after the flying Turks, followed them from the first line of trenches to the second, and then commenced attacking in good earnest, quite oblivious that they might now easily be surrounded and made prisoners. The attacking force, *i.e.* the chain of skirmishers and the forlorn hope, were followed by ten companies of the Vladimirsky Infantry Regiment. They were not to take part in the attack, but nevertheless their rôle was a most important one. Provided with trenching tools, it was their task to dig trenches as soon as the position which had been indicated as the

last point of our lines had been reached. The trenches were to grow up under their eyes.

The ten companies of the Vladimirsky Regiment were drawn up in a line where the trenches were to be dug; and whilst the attacking forces were finding their attack gradually changing into a retreat, and were keeping at a distance with their volleys the hordes of advancing Turks, who were trying hard to regain their old position on the ridge of the Zeleny mountains; the Vladimirsky men worked briskly with their spades, raising the breastwork in front of them by a few inches every minute. The enemy literally rained bullets on them. By the light of these volleys they could see that the Turks had mustered strong. The bullets had a bewildering effect on the men, and buried themselves with fierce hissings in the freshly-made earthworks. Buzzing like bees, they whizzed past their ears, mingling their noise with the cries of the wounded and the penetrating shouts of the attacking Turks; but the work went on without interruption.

All this time Skobelev was at the front.

"He fights like an ensign," someone said of him that day.

"But he does not hide himself like a general," others rejoined.

No one rested, no one put his spade down for an instant. Many of the lines of workers remained unbroken. Now and again a soldier would give a groan, throw down his spade, and sink wounded to the ground. But his place was immediately filled by another, the Janisary's victim was carried to the rear, and the work

again went on as before. After the lapse of an hour the enemy's attack became so fierce, that men fell on every side in such masses, it was a wonder anyone remained alive in that hail-storm of bullets. But the heroism and strength of our men told. In the course of that hour the earthworks of the new trench had grown so high, that the fatigued men could already lay down their spades and rest from their work in *perfect safety*. The work was done, our position was saved. At that hour, although things were but in the commencement, we could triumph already over our victory.

In the meantime our artillery was also doing its duty. The batteries on our right and left flanks at Brestovetz, from Radishevo and Tutchenitza, from Pernia and Medven, cannonaded the Turks.

In an hour's time, when the trenches were almost completed, some of the attacking party returned to say that the cartridges were nearly all expended. A depôt was at once organised, and during the rest of the fight some ten or fifteen men, taking advantage of the darkness, kept crawling between the skirmishers and the trenches, supplying the former with ammunition. Thanks to this arrangement, firing was continued through nearly the entire night, and the Turks did not once succeed in getting near the heights they had lost.

At two o'clock in the morning the enemy's attack became particularly energetic, and the Turks now received large reinforcements. But by that time our men had the protection of the earthworks to fall back on. The skirmishers were called in, and the second

period of the battle commenced, the more regular one as far as the defence was concerned.

In this second period the new trench played a leading part. Ten companions of the Vladimirsky Regiment—the other five formed the reserve—received the attack of the enemy, which was now directed towards our left flank with a view to prevent the construction of parallel connecting lines. The men stood behind the earthworks and replied with well-sustained volleys. Their excitement had subsided, the fever of the first minutes was over, and they waited for the command, and then calmly sent forth a volume of fire over the breastwork, which for an instant pierced the surrounding darkness.

And where was Skobeleff all this time? There, where he ever was. First with the forlorn hope, then in the trenches personally directing the defence. When the attack was most obstinate, the young General mounted the breastwork, and, covered with grimy smoke, exposed to the enemy's fire, he cheered his men, and encouraged them to still greater exertions. In moments of comparative calm he inspected the trenches, chatted with the men, watched the growth of the breastwork, and visited the reserves. During one of these inspections, he noticed in the new central trench that the men were not drawn up closely enough. He consequently at once ordered up another company to support them. He then addressed the men:

“Mind, brothers, the enemy will again attack us very soon. I shall be on the left flank. You must fight like men. Die at your post, but do not give it up.”

“All right, your Excellency; we have Maneffsky with us,” was the answer.

Skobelev wrung Maneffsky's hand, and left. For the moment there was, comparatively speaking, peace and quiet. Skobelev took advantage of this interval to gallop to Brestovetz, and to write a despatch from thence to General Todleben at head-quarters in Touthenitza. He had scarcely had time to dictate a couple of words, when firing again commenced at Zeleny Gory. Mounting the first horse he could get hold of, Skobelev was off again, for fear he might lose his new position. The road was pelted with bullets. It was night, and the enemy was firing on Brestovetz, and into the ravines behind Zeleny Gory. Bullets were to right and to left of him, shrapnels exploded in the air, but nevertheless Skobelev arrived at the heights he had taken safe and sound. This is what had happened during his absence:

The enemy opened an enfilade fire on our men whilst they were still digging parallel lines from the first line of trenches to the reserve line. Two companies of raw troops just joined took fright at this, and threw down their guns and ran. These companies were not in the first line, but, so to speak, filled in the intervals between the front line and the reserves. The men in the front behaved splendidly under their respective captains, Maneffsky and Netchaieff. Thus, while the battle was raging at the front, the second line ran.

Skobelev, with his staff, was just mounting the Zeleny Gory, when they met these disorganised masses of men running in every direction.

“Look there! they are running!” the General

exclaimed. And here we had occasion to admire the perfect knowledge of military psychology which he possessed. A panic-stricken multitude it would be of no use to threaten; threats would only have the effect of demoralising them still more.

"Good health, my men!" * Skobelev[†] shouted cheerfully, even joyfully.

The men halted. Some of them even replied with the usual "We wish you good health!" but it was not by any means a unanimous shout, it was half-hearted.

"Thank you, my eagles, for your service. You have fought like heroes to-day."

The troops, who but a minute before had lost all presence of mind and self-control, now began to draw themselves up and fall into something like line.

"I am proud to command you; finer fellows than you I have never come across."

The fellows had now completely recovered. They stood in excellent line, and seemed to have woken up.

And now Skobelev[†] pretended suddenly to discover that they had not their muskets with them.

"What does this mean? Where are your weapons?"

The men looked down, but answered not a word.

"Where are your muskets, I ask you?"

Again a painful silence. This was followed by a complete change of scene with Skobelev[†].

"What have you done, then? Thrown away your muskets? You are cowards. You have run—and

* The usual Russian military greeting, especially by a general inspecting his men on parade. The regulation answer follows.

from Turks ! It is a disgrace ; it is shameful ! You miserable wretches you ! I won't command such scum. Be off ! Get out of my sight ! ”

The men were now quite humiliated ; and stood transfixed to the ground.

“ March after me ! ”

The musketless company marched regularly after the General, who kept scolding them all the time. On arriving at their old position they resumed their guns.

“ Follow me ! ” Skobelevff shouted, and led them into the open space between our own and the enemy's trenches. He drew them up at the most exposed point and put them through their facings. He himself stood in front of them, and nearer still to the Turkish lines.

“ Shoulder arms ! ”

The command was obeyed, but not confidently, not well.

“ This won't do. Stand at ease ! Now then, shoulder arms ! ”

This time it was done better.

“ Once more. Nothing but parade drill will suit me. Shoulder arms ! ”

Executed splendidly.

“ Present arms ! ”

And thus he drilled them under the most unmerciful fire till they went through their facings with the smartness of the parade ground. Then he let them go back to their trenches.

And now the ramparts were completed ; but there was only room behind them, as yet, for the men who were making them. The ditch was still too narrow.

The General and his staff were, therefore, obliged to pass in front, and thus run the imminent risk of getting a bullet at their head or chest. Just then Captain Kouropatkin noticed that some of the skirmishers, notwithstanding the order to retreat, had not made up their minds to come back, and were still lying scattered about. He walked out in front of the trench and shouted to their commanding officer:

“Captain Dombroffsky, will you be so good as to bring back those who are still remaining?”

“I will do what I can,” Dombroffsky gallantly replied, touching his cap; but while he was in the act of lifting his hand something whistled past Kouropatkin, and Dombroffsky lay stretched dead on the ground, without even a groan. The ball had entered his temple.

Half an hour later our detachment could lay down their heads and sleep in peace. The parallel lines connecting the front trenches with the rearmost had been completed. The Turks, if they had repeated their attack with a considerably larger force, might perhaps have succeeded in capturing the trench of our left flank—but this would no longer have been an important loss. And thus, whilst reinforcements were coming up, our men calmly slumbered. For that night the battle was over. The Turks lost faith in the possibility of dislodging us from Zeleny Gory, and turned their attention to other positions. They marched on the left flank at Brestovetz, but were beaten back with heavy losses; they then descended in thick masses, like clouds, on our right flank, but had to run again,

leaving on the field a large number of killed and wounded. At both those points they were beaten back by detachments from the Souzdal Regiment, ensconced in their trenches. They then threw themselves on the battery covering our right flank; but they met with such a devastating fire from the first line of trenches that they did not get within fifty paces.

Returning in the fog, we nearly lost our whereabouts; we could see nothing beyond a few paces. Thanks to this circumstance a Turkish kitchen fell into our hands, which, of course, was taken to the lines. A Turkish transport waggon drove in among us too, the driver shouting to our men to get out of his way. On discovering his mistake he was going to turn back; but he was too late, and, amidst peals of laughter, our men proceeded to examine the contents of the Turkish pots and kettles.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was grey and foggy on the morning after that memorable night, during which the defenders of the freshly-taken position knew no rest. As soon as fighting was over they worked with their spades. The work was continued into the next day. The trenches had to be deepened and widened, the breastworks to be made thicker, especially at the top, where Turkish bullets had told, and banquettes had to be erected on which sentries could be posted and which would permit the whole guard to mount in case of an alarm. Our losses were also properly estimated, and it was discovered that 130 men were missing from the ranks. Those that did not work cleaned the guns. Only a few were fortunate enough to be allowed to sleep on the damp cold ground wrapped up in their over-coats. At 7 A.M. it was still dark, but the men received their hot rations. The soldiers of the Vladimir Regiment made themselves little stoves in the breastwork. The wood for lighting them was gathered under the enemy's fire, behind the

trenches. Small clouds of smoke ascended from these extempore stoves, and groups of shivering soldiers stood warming themselves in front of them, whilst their tea was boiling in their field-cans. A hole had been dug for the General in the centre of the trench; this hole was filled up with straw, and here Skobelev rested, "with his martial cloak around him."

He did not sleep much, however, for he jumped up every now and again and inspected the position. Once he himself seized a spade and showed the men how to work.

"You see," he said, turning round, "learning sapper's work was of some use after all."

By noon the trench was so changed in appearance it could not be recognised. There was a broad path within on which three men could walk abreast. The breastwork was so high and broad that a grenade could not penetrate it. The guns were not lying on the top of the breastwork, but in little embrasures made on purpose for them. Banquettes ran along the entire breastwork. A whole regiment could stand under arms on them. The trench itself had been lengthened by a mile, and was curved on the right and left flanks. This was an Egyptian task, when the small amount of time spent over it is remembered. Nevertheless Skobelev was not satisfied.

"Push a battery up here; and for God's sake make embrasures and breastworks for it at once, so that we may salute the Turks with grenades from here by to-morrow night," Skobelev urged on Melnitzky, although the men were all much fatigued.

Melnitzky was himself on his last legs with weariness, but set to work at once nevertheless.

“When will it be ready?”

“By midnight.”

“Don’t you think it could be done before? I know,” Skobelev continued, “that as soon as it gets dark the enemy will try to recapture these trenches. We should receive them with bombs and grape-shot.”

“We will try to be ready by ten o’clock to-morrow.”

“What is the name of the sergeant who will superintend the work?”

“Mitrophan Koltzoff.”

“Point him out to me.”

A handsome sergeant of sappers was brought before Skobelev.

“Was it you, my friend, who dug at the trenches under yesterday’s fire?”

“It was I, your Excellency.”

“Well, look here, my fine fellow: if you finish the batteries for me by to-morrow night, and throw up some earthworks on our left flank during the night, you shall be a Knight of St. George on the day after to-morrow.”

“I will try.”

“Very well. Remember my promise.”

“If I am not killed, I will do it.”

“And if you get killed, you will die honourably for your country.”

“I will do my duty, your Excellency.”

“If Kolokoltzeff engages to do a thing he will do it,” said Melnitzky, trying to reassure the excited General.

The space between our new trench and the enemy's position consisted of a deserted strip of withered bushes of small oak, the dry leaves of which fell off at the slightest touch. Here and there a few pear-trees were scattered about, but they were also bare and fruitless. These trees were taken advantage of by the enemy's sharp-shooters, who climbed into the branches and shot down on our men in the trenches from thence, believing themselves perfectly safe. But this sort of thing got monotonous after a time, and so our fellows jumped over to shoot the "game," as they called them. No sooner had a Turkish sharp-shooter singled out a fresh victim and pointed the muzzle of his Peabody at him—when the report of a gun resounded through the bushes, and the game fell clumsily from his perch, breaking the branches in his fall.

Indeed, many graves had sprung up along the trenches. The killed were buried at once. A prayer was read over their bodies, the freshly-made ditch was blessed with the sign of the cross, and then nothing remained of the man—nothing but the memory of him, and the tears shed for him in some distant little hamlet, where his family would vainly await the return of their bread-winner. The later it got, the more uneasy everyone grew. Officers were continually mounting the breastworks and looking into the distance, which the twilight had already converted into an impenetrable mass of mist. The sentries were ordered to keep their eyes fixed on the space in front of the trenches, and the non-commissioned officers had orders not to sleep, but to patrol all night. Skobelev himself

went over the trenches several times during the night.

“Do not fire on any account,” were his orders. “Give the alarm by word of mouth, rather. If the Turks should come up—prepare to receive them, but that is all. The nearer they come the better. Hold the muzzle lower, so that at the word of command you may not shoot crows over the enemy’s head, but may hit him. Should the Turks jump on the ramparts—then your holiday will commence. Give them the cold steel. It is not the first time we are fighting them, my men. Well, how would you aim if the Turks should attack us?” he asked one of the sentinels.

The man put his gun up to his shoulder and took aim.

“That is just the way to hit the crows. Look here, you must aim like this,” and he showed him how to take aim.

“Gentlemen,” he said, turning to the officers, “please show the men and explain to them how this should be done.”

The enemy’s fire grew heavier and heavier and more frequent. Our troops often wished to reply, but the officers sternly forbade it. The nerves of the men on duty were in strong tension. A few irregular shots from some of our soldiers,—and all our fellows jumped on the ramparts, and a purposeless, useless rattle of musketry commenced, the men believing the enemy to be at hand. The Turks answered, and the firing grew more furious and more promiscuous. Result—the waste

of a thousand rounds of ammunition, fatigue, and wounded.

When it had grown quite dark, Skobelev had dinner served him in the trenches; here the samovar was also got ready for him. The fog grew denser and denser; the noise of footsteps and the hum of voices in the trenches died away; the red glow of the camp-kettles was carried up high into the mist of that autumnal night. It was by the light of these kettles that the Turkish sentries aimed.

It soon grew very cold. Sitting on the banquettes, and leaning their backs against the breastwork, the men slept, looking like clumps of grey earth on the ground.

In front, at a distance of fifty paces in the direction of the enemy, bushes and trees could be still distinguished; but further, the fire from occasional shots, at a distance of two or three hundred paces, alone indicated the presence of the enemy. When a rustling was heard in the bushes the sentry would prick up his ears. But a minute later he would discover it was but one of our scouts returning, or some little animal creeping from this unquiet, noisy place.

It grew darker and darker; and the Turks' fire grew fainter and fainter, as though they also had got tired of it. The officers were talking in their sleep. Apparently even their nerves had suffered from what they had gone through. "Halt, stop!" someone whispered; and again silence reigned, as though there was no one in the trenches, as though we were in the kingdom of death. The camp-fires had gone out too. Not even the leaves on the trees rustled. But the

sentinels kept looking more and more intently into the darkness. What was that? Something seemed to scrape against the breastwork, and then died away again. No—there was the noise again; footsteps could be distinctly heard stealing up. The sentinel pulled himself together and pointed the muzzle of his gun in the direction of the noise. One listened with beating heart, the eyes staring attentively into the fog and darkness.

“Don’t fire,” a voice could be heard to say outside the breastwork; “I am a scout.”

“What is the matter?”

“Don’t fire, wake the General. The Turks are leaving their trenches and forming for action.”

“To arms!” someone shouted behind. I turned round — Skobelev was already at the breastworks. “To arms, my men! To the breastwork! Call in the scouts!”

The General had heard the noise in his sleep, and had awakened just in time to overhear the last sentence of the returning scout.

There was an uproar for a moment. The awakened men stood on the banquettes and seized their muskets. Their heads reached just to the level of the breastwork. It was like in an enchanted country: all awoke the same instant.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“I KNEW the attack would be to-day,” Skobeleff whispered. “Now, mind, stand like men! Wait for the enemy till he comes within short range; fire when you are ordered, not before. Gentlemen,” turning to the officers, “to your posts. If the enemy gets up the breastwork, give him your bayonets. How would you receive him, my fine fellow?”

“Like that, your Excellency!” the man replied, holding up his bayonet.

“That’s it! I am afraid the Turks will break through our line somewhere,” he said to Kouropatkin. “Of course we shall chase them out again, but we shall have a bad half-hour. Have up the reserves.”

In a few more minutes the death-like stillness around became suddenly alive with noise and tumult. The Turks disclosed their vicinity and marched at us firing, according to their usual custom.

“How many are there?”

“They can only be estimated by the line of fire,” and

Skobeleff stood behind the breastwork watching the hordes approaching.

In front we could see through the twilight the first line firing their terrific volleys as they advanced. The line was a mile in length, and from the volume of their volleys it was clear that they were not extended in skirmishing order, that they were coming on as in a dense column. The volleys came nearer and nearer. A thousand bullets whistled, buzzed, and groaned over our heads. They entered the earthworks and disappeared into them screeching. Some lodged in trees with a hissing sound resembling the pouring of molten lead into water.

The more quiet we kept, the louder and more intense became the rattling of the enemy's musketry. We kept quiet, and waited for them to come up. The Turks could now be descried. Their first line was about seventy feet distant. In the red light of their volleys the muzzles of their guns were visible, and dark masses could be seen behind them. Between the rattle of musketry we could plainly distinguish the wild cries of "Allah!" Somewhere on the right flank the Turks were shouting our "Hurrah!"

"Battalion, fire!"

It was a moment of deafening noise. The black summit of our trench looked resplendent and golden, while volleys were heard simultaneously on our right and on our left.

"Don't give them time to recover. Fire in platoons!" Skobeleff commanded.

And now our grape was poured on them. Our

batteries at Brestovetz began to lift up their voices, and the enemy replied from Krishin. A good many shrapnels exploded much too soon, and one Turkish grenade fell amongst the enemy's own men.

Another volley! Again there was a crash. The earth seemed to shake under us. But the Turks were very obstinate on this occasion. They were now within forty paces of us. Death was making havoc in their ranks, but they kept marching on undaunted. The situation was getting serious. Skobelev jumped on the breastwork to conduct the defence of the trench in person. The fire of the volleys and its dull reflection on the dark men immersed in smoke, giving them a lurid red glare, looked like an aureole round him. Bullets were flying about in every direction, some unpleasantly near our heads, some buried themselves in the earthworks and called sparks from the ground as they fell. Skobelev's voice did not rest for an instant. He was heard everywhere; on the right flank as well as on the left. He threw his wild shouts right in the face of the enemy. The volleys grew more frequent. Chaos seemed to reign around—one lost his head, and consciousness refused to serve him.

“Thank God! They have been repulsed!”

All the night lights could be seen moving about in front of our trenches where the Turks had made their attack. At first our sentries were inclined to fire on them; but Skobelev shouted at them:

“How dare you fire! Are you Turks? They are collecting their killed and wounded!”

By seven o'clock, after a most fatiguing night in the

trenches, our men grew depressed. All were tired and worn out. It was damp and cold. The field smelt of blood.

"I'll wake them up!" said Skobeleff gaily, and ordered up the band of the Vladimir Infantry Regiment. Fancy having music in the trenches at a distance of about a hundred paces from the enemy! But the enlivening influence it had on the fatigued and dispirited men was wonderful. The national anthem was played to the accompaniment of volleys from our batteries, shots from our sentries, and the loud applause of grape-shot; for the sound of grape-shot is very much like the applause on a first night at the theatre. As soon as the hymn was over, it was followed by vociferous cheering, in which the roar of guns and muskets was drowned as in a sea. And this was followed by the Plevna March, a march not unfamiliar to this regiment. The music kept playing till night, and from henceforth every regiment took its band to the trenches. The men themselves asked for it.

"We have lost the art of war," said Skobeleff. "Our father's were better military psychologists, and knew the influence of music on soldiers. It raises the spirit of the entire army. Napoleon—the god of war—knew this well, and led his men to the charge to the stirring sound of a march."

Later on Skobeleff went to inspect other positions; and as soon as he showed himself at the lodgments the enemy opened fire on Akh-Pasha (the White General). The General thanked the men for so bravely beating back the enemy; and told them to choose two of their

number for the St. George's Cross. When these had been chosen, the men formed in line in the lodgment, and the two new Knights of St. George received their crosses to the wild music of Turkish bullets. Skobelev told them that he had commenced with their regiment because it did not belong to his division. "My own fellows will receive their decorations afterwards," he added. There were two routes back to the Zeleny Gory trenches: one was comparatively safe, leading through Brestovetz, past the batteries of the right flank, the other was very much exposed, being in a straight line and lying midway between our lines and those of the enemy. There was no room for doubt that Skobelev would choose the second route, which would give him the opportunity of seeing whether the Turks had made any alterations in their dispositions or not. When he reached Zeleny Gory the battery was nearly ready. "To-night we will give them a taste of our guns," Skobelev exclaimed exultingly.

At two o'clock in the morning it was indeed decided to give the enemy "a taste of them." Fire was opened from four guns. For an instant the profile of the trench and the row of withered bushes were lighted up with a lurid glare, and then all was dark again. For that instant the sky was aglow and the dark masses of the enemy's earthworks were plainly visible. The grape-shot seemed to have inflicted some damage on the enemy, for their fire was silenced, and it became evident that the main body was retreating.

The battery had been completed, and the sergeant of sappers, Mitrophan Kolokoltzeff, had earned his St

George's Cross. Kolokoltzeff had honourably done his duty under fire, and remained sound as by a miracle. The General enquired for him that morning, but it appeared that the sergeant had been despatched to Brestovetz on duty. So Skobelev made the St. George's Cross up in a parcel and enclosed it in the following letter :

The Trenches, 31st October 1877.

To Sergeant Kolokoltzeff, according to promise, for the energy, manliness, and bravery he displayed in action on the 29th and 30th of October. Prayers to God and service to the Emperor are never thrown away. I congratulate you from my heart.

Yours respectfully,

MICHAEL SKOBELEFF.

By the time this note had been penned, Kolokoltzeff appeared himself. The men were at once drawn up in line in the trench, the band played, and the St. George's Cross was solemnly hung round Kolokoltzeff's neck.

"And now let me shake hands with you," Skobelev exclaimed as he held out his hand to him in token of friendly respect. When Kolokoltzeff marched back with the cross on his breast, the men presented arms of their own accord. The tears stood in the fine fellow's eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE Turks were hard at work digging on both their flanks. From the character of their works it was evident that they proposed to erect batteries wherewith to treat us to a bombardment of some duration. This intelligence was reported to Skobelev.

“All right, let them place their guns. They won’t keep them long. Our fellows will take them from them.”

Towards evening our batteries at Brestovetz and Radishevo were at their destructive work again and played on the Turks. The guns were served admirably; scarcely a shot was wasted. Later in the evening our men in the trenches could be heard solemnly chanting the Lord’s Prayer and the Te Deum. The whole regiment posted here chanted together. The voices of the reserves on Zeleny Gory joined in the chant, and even those of the Souzdal Regiment, stationed at Brestovetz, were mingled in it. The night was still, and the sound was carried far away through the magnificent calmness of the evening air. In the skies above a clear moon shed her liquid light, and there was no mist or fog. At night Skobelev tested his guns and fired on

the enemy's trenches longitudinally. When everything was quiet again, the enemy suddenly recommenced pouring volleys upon us from his batteries, whilst the ridge of their earthworks was lighted up with the lurid glare of their musketry-fire. Our ramparts were also illuminated with a sort of golden glow. The wind carried back the clouds of smoke which threatened to surround us. The enemy continued firing for half an hour for no apparent adequate reason, and without producing any effect on us. Our men had long since discontinued their replies, but somehow the Turks would not calm down. At last their shots grew less frequent, and gradually died away. A few sentries only had climbed into some trees and kept peppering away right into our trenches. At first they could hit the earthworks only; but soon they managed to send their balls through the narrow lunettes of the breast-work, where they buried themselves in the clayey soil close to our sleeping men.

"Our scouts must have been badly posted," Skobelev remarked.

"What makes you think so?"

"One of them has been shot. The enemy may possibly see them. They must be immediately posted at fresh places."

"I will go and do so at once," an officer (Gunkvist) exclaimed.

"No; I will do it myself," Skobelev answered.

"But the Turks will aim at you as soon as you show yourself. The distance from the enemy is so very short."

“Let them do their worst!”

And, attended by his orderlies, Skobelev cleared the ramparts. Our hearts palpitated in fear for him. We momentarily expected to see a stray shot, of which there were so many flying about across the open plain, put an end to his brilliant career; and we felt angry with our young General for so wantonly exposing himself, as though there was no one to place scouts about the field but he. A general cannot do everything himself. The half hour which Skobelev spent outside our works exposed to the enemy's fire was one of the greatest anxiety to every individual man belonging to the regiment. That we left off firing along the whole line goes without saying. Otherwise even our own shots might have chanced to hit the General and his brave companions.

“Good God! If they should lay him low—the soldier's friend!”

“None but God can do that. If He guards him he is safe.”

“His life is charmed. He does not care.”

“Yes; they say it was charmed at Khiva. Soldiers say that a Khivite led him nine days and nine nights round about infidel Khiva and charmed his life. Then Skobelev did not take any food for nine days and nine nights, the Khivite muttering his strange spells all the time. And now his life is thoroughly charmed; so that bullets can pass though his body without doing him any injury!”

Whilst Skobelev is posting the scouts I will describe his original mode of life in the trenches.

It was a little more comfortable now, however, for a ditch had been dug in which he could stretch himself out to his full length. A bed had also been brought from Brestovetz, and a table, with a few stools to sit on. The roof to this ditch, the walls of which were of earth, was a thatch taken from a neighbouring village; the thatch was covered with straw, the straw with earth. The foremost part of the roof was uncovered, and through this opening bullets continually fell into the hut. An iron stove had been procured, at which we used to go and warm ourselves at night when the cold was more than usually piercing. The table was covered with maps, plans, and papers. For Skobelev hardly ever rested. During the intervals between the attacks of the enemy and the superintendence of our work, Skobelev either studied or wrote. How different from those heroic generals who usually surround themselves with every possible comfort at quarters about ten miles distant from the line of fire, and who, when they did come to inspect their divisions, took care to choose a time when there is no fighting going on! In front of this hut, at one of the broadest parts of the trench, Skobelev's staff was huddled together, and shivered, for the cold was frightful. Fortunately I had the good luck to secure a soldier's cloak, in which I wrapped myself. But, even thus protected, the cold seemed to enter my bones. The men sat at the camp-fires warming their hands.

"I say, let us cure the General of his love of exposing himself," said a voice amongst them.

"How are you to do that?"

"But did not you notice how he hates people to stand by his side on exposed ground?" Skobelev certainly possessed this trait. Though continually risking his own life, no one could be more anxious for the safety of others. "Every time he jumps on the ramparts let us jump after him."

This idea evidently pleased the men.

Skobelev soon gave them an opportunity for putting it into execution. When he returned from posting the scouts the enemy opened fire. The General kept standing on the ramparts in the very face of the fire. In an instant he was surrounded by a crowd; orderlies, officers, field-officers, all were there.

"What are you standing here for, gentlemen? Have you come to meet your bullets?" Skobelev asked in an irritated tone.

"We have the honour to belong to your Excellency's staff," an orderly officer replied, putting his hand to his cap.

The General understood him, and laughed.

This was repeated two or three times, till Skobelev was obliged to descend.

Some will say this was mere bravado. Of course they will be right to a certain degree. But there was method in it. When he was informed the enemy was constructing works, he preferred to find out for himself what he was doing. Another would have contented himself with depending on the reports of his subordinates; Skobelev depended on himself and his own eyes.

CHAPTER XX.

THIS day had been appointed for decorating the men with the crosses of St. George. The sappers received more than any other branch of the service; because they rendered the most valuable service at the taking and fortifying of Zeleny Gory. The next in order of precedence were the artillerymen.

This was followed by an unexpected episode, which produced a very deep impression on the men. As Skobeleff was decorating the men of the Vladimir Infantry Regiment he came up to a sergeant of one of those companies which had fled on the memorable night of the 28th October.

“Don’t bear me any malice, my good fellow, but I cannot give you the cross,” said Skobeleff.

The man seemed to feel the words like blows. His face became as pale as ashes, and he shook from head to foot.

“You may deserve one, in that case your captain must recommend you for decoration; but you must recollect that I am now giving orders to men chosen for the honour by their comrades. Do you think your

company has the right to choose any—your company, which, though it rallied afterwards, disgraced itself by running away? Do you think cowards should be permitted to choose candidates for the St. George's cross?"

"No, they should not, your Excellency," the man replied.

"Then you must forgive me, comrade, but I will not give you a cross."

The companies which had left their work at the parallel trenches and fled on the 28th of October stood next.

"I do not wish to know them! Tell them that. Do you hear me?"

"We can hear, your Excellency!"

"I do not look upon them as my own men. They are aliens! I will not speak to them. I do not wish to notice them. They have disgraced your splendid regiment, which fought so bravely at Iovtschina. You remember that action?"

"We remember it," re-echoed from every side.

"Tell them this, Colonel," Skobelev continued, turning to the commanding officer of the regiment. "I wish you to inform the officers, once for all, that he who remains in the rear during action has no place in my division. He may go. They may take my division from me, but, as long as I command it, it shall be officered by brave men. I will not command cowards."

Skobelev kept his word, and took no notice of the disgraced companies. At reviews, after hailing the other companies of the regiment, he would pass by these in silence, without even looking at them.

The men felt this deeply.

“How long will this last?” he was asked.

“Until I want something specially difficult and daring to be done ; when I shall want men I can depend on. Then I will take these very companies ; and I feel convinced that they will follow me through thick and thin. Well, then we shall embrace and make it up. It will be a splendid lesson. Since our reverses I find that our troops, especially those which have been reinforced by reserves, are composed of very different materials from the old ones. These will have to be taught all over again.”

In extenuation of their conduct it must be remembered that the action in which they fled took place at night in foggy weather, and that these particular companies had more freshly-joined reserves in their ranks than the others. All the circumstances calculated to cause failure were present.

While on the subject of orders, I asked him :

“Is not an order granted for personal bravery, by the authorities, considered a greater distinction than one conferred by the vote of comrades?”

“Yes.”

“Then why do you give the less important orders to your best men?”

“The reason is simple enough. An order voted for is conferred at once ; and the recipient is made happy. But if a man is recommended for decoration, we have to wait three months before the recommendation is confirmed at head-quarters, and in that time the poor fellow can get shot ever so often.”

To secure our position from a sudden surprise by the enemy, Skobelevff conceived the idea of throwing telegraph wires in front of the trenches. Fortunately the Turks had left their telegraph lines behind them. So these were pressed into service against their former owners.

In the Franco-German war, Skobelevff said, the Germans adopted the same plan, and it was found to answer satisfactorily. When the French came up during very dark nights, they got entangled in the wires, and the noise thus occasioned awakened the watch.

In an hour's time a few coils of wire were already lying ready at the trenches.

It was decided to clear the space in front of the trenches and to make an esplanade that night. It was a nasty night, damp and rainy; mud everywhere, and people lying in it. The banquettes were wet, on these wet banquettes we sat. The heavens kept pouring down large drops of rain. Our cloaks were wet through; one could wring them. The vine-branches piled in the pits dug in the earthworks smoked but gave out no heat; a vapoury smoke spread over us and nearly choked us. The sentries shivered. The men had huddled themselves together to keep warm.

At ten o'clock a line of skirmishers was ordered out to protect our men at their work in front of the trenches.

In the silent night dark figures mounted the dark earthworks; they appeared for an instant in the grey fog on the ridge of our works, a straight line of muskets, and we had barely time to distinguish them before the ridge was bare again. A minute later we could hear

a rustling as of feet stealing warily along somewhere. Our trench became enveloped in profound silence. The men had orders not to reply to the stray shots of the enemy, and it was specially undesirable to rouse them to-day. For, at two hundred paces behind us, redoubts were in process of creation; and the wild volleys of the enemy, instead of hitting us in the trenches, would fly over our heads and injure those engaged on the works behind. The noise of spade and shovel, and the grating sound of the falling earth, could only be heard on approaching quite close to the redoubt. The work was proceeding very quietly, so that the redoubt would prove an unpleasant surprise for the Turks two days hence, although it was erected exclusively for defensive purposes. In the darkness we could distinctly hear Skobelev's clear, nervous voice; he was again up all night.

The men engaged on the esplanade had been concentrated on the left flank. They had orders to perform their work as noiselessly as possible. They crossed the breastwork with equal noiselessness. Immediately in front of the works, vine-bushes entangled in each other's branches were situated. These would have seriously impeded our movements had an advance been decided on. Besides which the enemy might take advantage of them and come up to us unperceived under cover of the bushes. A gentle rustling sound soon announced that the work had begun. We could distinguish from the trenches the rustling of falling leaves, the crackling of breaking branches, the thud of spades against the straggling roots, and the creak of the trunks as the

sharp knives of our men cut them down. The louder the noise grew in that cold, damp, melancholy night, the more excited and alarmed we became. Men with litters stood ready to remove the wounded in case of action, and the alarm spread along the whole trench. The men who had been sleeping in the first part of the night rose and lined the breastwork, and watched the progress of the work outside. They were calm and collected. Now and then some of them would exclaim: "Why do they make such a row, the devils?"

The noise seemed to grow more distant; seemed to be travelling away from us and to be getting nearer to the enemy. This intensified the general excitement. Near us all was now quite still; but further off the noise was growing louder, in the direction of the enemy, whose hordes were probably on the alert and awake.

"Now, God help them!" a sentinel sighed out; "they must have got quite close up now—the least muddle, and we shall have a Tamasha."

"Who spoke about Tamasha?" Skobelev's voice enquired somewhere in the dark near us. It was really wonderful how he managed to be everywhere.

"I," the sentry replied.

"Then you have been in Turkestan?"

"Quite so."

"How is it you have not the St. George?"

"I have two," the sentinel answered in an offended tone.

In another minute Skobelev had climbed over the breastwork and joined the men at work, and now already a hundred paces distant from us.

"Thank God! everything is going well," his voice was again heard to say. He had returned.

But at that very instant shots were fired from the enemy's right flank, which faced our left. It became clear that it was not one man alone who was firing, the alarm was apparently spreading along their lines. That was a volley!—another!

"Ah! bad business!" someone said close to us.

And now we could see figures mounting our works.

"Who are you?" Skobelev shouted at them.

"We have come back from our work; can't stand it," the men, who did not recognise him, answered.

"Have you finished it?"

"No. The Turks are firing; it is impossible. The Turk is visible and invisible—everywhere." And the men let themselves down heavily into the trench.

"You are afraid! Your comrades are working and you are afraid!" screamed Skobelev, furiously. "Close up!"

The panic-stricken men drew themselves up.

"March off again to your work! And quickly, too, or, by God, I will take you in front of the Turkish trenches and put you through your facings! You know me!"

Four or five figures climbed up the ramparts and returned to their work.

"Gentlemen," said Skobelev to the officers standing near him, "please see that the men do their work properly."

Not long afterwards the sound of axes could be heard; whereupon the Turks re-opened their firing.

A little later a whole line of dark figures appeared on our earthworks.

“ Well? ”

“ We have finished our work completely.”

“ Have you any wounded? ”

“ Not a single man. We read the muster-roll on our way back. The esplanade is finished, the trees are all cut down, and the space is quite open.”

“ God be thanked! Thank you, comrades! ”

The success of the expedition encouraged the men very much and raised their spirits. They chatted, laughed and joked; but only for a short time—Nature soon asserted herself, and the trenches were again immersed in silence. The men returned from the expedition threw themselves down in the mud, whilst the rain was falling faster and faster, and wrapped themselves more closely in their cloaks already soaked with wet. The skirmishers sought refuge in the lodgments in front of the breastwork.

It was lucky that the huts had been erected in time, A few more such nights and we should have had disease in our ranks.

The men had crawled off from their work on all fours, so that the enemy's bullets had flown over their heads. That is why there had been no casualties.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE damp and foggy morning of the 2nd of November seemed even colder than the preceding night. Everyone looked depressed. The men commenced making their tea in their camp-kettles, and the smoke in the trenches seemed to eat out one's eyes. The fires were being lighted. The enemy had prepared a surprise for us. About a hundred paces of the menacing profile of newly-constructed earthworks could be seen rising through the fog. The earthworks could be very well distinguished, with embrasures and guns and all. The sentinel, even, standing guard, was perfectly visible—a grey figure against a grey ground, wrapped in a grey cloak with the hood pulled over his head. How near it seemed!

Skobelev was furious.

“They must be chastised for their insolence!” he exclaimed; “and we must take care to guarantee ourselves for the future against such surprises. By taking up a position so close to our trenches the enemy might easily commence shooting down all my detachment. A

fire facing us from their ramparts would be harmless ; but an enfilading fire could put sixty men out of action every day."

A night attack was again determined on. But the men were nearly all newly-joined, and an action in the dark might disconcert them. The General found means of making the plan of attack thoroughly clear and plain in its minutest details to the men. All the non-commissioned officers of the section chosen to make the attack were ordered to assemble on the right flank near the mitrailleuse.

"Sit down in a circle, my men," Skobelev told them.

This was the first time that I had assisted at a council of war composed of the general of division and—his men! To judge by the composure and ease of the latter, it would appear that this was by no means the first time such a gathering had been held, and that they were perfectly used to it. Indeed, I was afterwards informed that it was Skobelev's custom always to hold a meeting of this kind before fighting a battle.

The non-commissioned officers of the Souzdal Regiment sat round him in a circle, and the privates were grouped round them in an outer circle. They all kept their eyes fixed on the General, and eagerly listened to his words.

"Look here, my men. We are going into action to-night, and I must have a talk with you, so that there may be no muddle."

A murmur of joyous approval ran through the ranks.

"I am very much dissatisfied with my division. It is quite changed from what it used to be."

"There are many new hands, your Excellency. They have come from Russia and are not yet used to the work."

"Your business, the duty of old soldiers, is to teach them their work."

"They will get used to it, your Excellency."

"Well, now, you see, the Turks have come within a hundred paces of our left flank. Have you seen their trenches?"

"We have seen them."

"We have not."

"Your colonel will show them to those who have not seen them. Their trenches are in our way; and for this reason we must punish them for their insolence in the first place, and, secondly, send them back where they came from."

"Of course we must! He is shooting straight at us from over there, your Excellency."

"That is just it. So this is what I have been thinking of doing. The force, of which you will form a part, must find its way to the enemy to-night with its drums behind it. You must march up to the trenches as noiselessly as possible. As soon as you come within twenty paces of them you must cheer, and the drums must beat the alarm. Then you must throw yourselves into the trenches, bayonet everyone you come across, drive the Turks away, and capture as many guns as you can. I give three roubles myself for every gun that is taken."

Another murmur of applause.

“The enemy’s whole strength is in his muskets. Take his musket away from him and he is nowhere. They are not soldiers. If you kill a Turk and leave him his gun, they won’t mind a bit; they will find another man to take his place immediately. As soon as you see the Turks coming on in large numbers, jump over the ramparts and lie down. Do not fire—you hear! When the word is given, then pour in your volleys, but not otherwise. If there are too many of them, you may retreat; but slowly, firing on them as you retire. If the enemy does not come for some time, fill up the trench with earth. If you should see that two hordes are coming against you, retire, but quietly and orderly; fire when the word is given, and remember that the enemy hates volleys, especially when you shoot well together.”

“He thinks volleys the most disagreeable things in the world,” a young soldier remarked.

“Exactly. When you retreat you must not only bring your wounded back with you, but you must not leave your killed behind you either. Remember, if you leave but one man behind, you had better not show yourselves to me. I won’t look at you.”

“Of course we won’t leave anyone, your Excellency.”

“Mind you don’t. Remember you are Christians. Have you understood my idea now?”

“Yes.”

“You, youngster, repeat what I said you will have to do,” Skobelev said, turning to a tremendous, red-

haired sergeant, who had looked all the time as though he was ready to jump down the General's throat. The man repeated it, he had understood it all perfectly.

"Well, but now what will you do if the Turks turn and attack you?"

This question was also satisfactorily answered.

"Mind, my men, you must fight like devils. Prove that you are the same fellows with whom I took Lovtscha and the redoubts of Plevna."

"We will."

"Well, comrades, has anyone anything to say?"

"I, your Excellency," said a young sergeant, drawing himself up.

"What is it?"

"It won't do to march straight out of the trenches. The enemy's scouts are too near; they would see us at once. It would be better to creep out from our flanks."

"You're a brick! Thank you for your advice," Skobelev replied; "only it is not always possible to adopt that plan. And now, Colonel, show them the enemy's trenches and position, and distance from us. But carefully, from the embrasures. The non-commissioned officers will subsequently explain to the men."

As he was returning he met a sergeant-major.

"Take care the affair turns out well. Choose men you can rely on; do not take any trash with you."

"May I leave the Tartars behind?"

Skobelev frowned. The proposal evidently displeased him greatly.

"Can't you depend on them, then?"

"No; I do not trust them."

"It's your business. Leave them behind you. Only that sort of thing is painfully unpleasant to me. How many have you got?"

"There are about eight men."

"Well, leave them. What a beastly thing! To have to show distrust from the first in that way. But it can't be helped; it is a risky affair."

That day the band of the Souzdal Regiment played in the trenches. It had followed its regiment into action a short time ago, and several trumpets had bullet-holes in them. Skobelev insisted that they should remain as they were, and that, like tattered flags, they should not be changed for new ones.

It had grown quite dark. The fog, which had lasted for several days and was so desirable for this evening's undertaking, was clearing up. A few bashful stars could even be seen in the heavens, and the moon was cutting her way through the silvery mist.

"Looks bad."

"We shall be unable to commence at ten. We must wait till twelve. It is sure to get dark by that time."

Colonel Kashin was more excited than anyone.

The trenches were inspected. The men who were to go were already collected at three distinct points. But as yet it was only 11 o'clock, and very light. The fog was disappearing. There was dead silence in the trenches, and an expression of sadness and depression on the men's faces. Everyone felt nervous. Even

Skobelev was nervous. But they were all ready to go. It was their duty.

"Now, comrades, it is time. Mind, stand like men," Skobelev whispered. "I am going to see which is the best plan, to climb over the trenches or to go out at the flanks."

And Skobelev climbed over the ramparts. The enemy was quite quiet, there was nothing but the usual wild occasional random shots. Skobelev went along the whole line and re-entered the trench from its left flank.

"No; over the ramparts is the best plan. Now, in God's name!"

Twenty-five men of the advanced guard climbed over. Another party climbed over at another spot; the others joined them from the right.

Skobelev now gave them his last instructions.

"When you have crossed, form in one line, and march elbow to elbow, so that each soldier may feel his comrade by his side."

For, true military psychologist as he was, Skobelev was fully alive to the inspiring influence of such a formation.

No sound could be heard on the other side of the ramparts. Had they hidden themselves? We climbed on to the banquettes and looked out into the distance. There they were moving slowly on in line. Minutes, instants, or hours passed; we know not. Our whole being was concentrated on our eyes and ears. We could only see and hear, feeling every other sense had died away.

A cheer rent the air through the solemn stillness of the night; a cheer which was caught up by the firm roll of drums and the instantaneous volleys of musketry.

“Hurrah!” and in the very cheer a discordant sound could be detected; it was a loud, despairing groan of some poor fellow.

As in every previous action, a portion of the attacking force was seized with a panic, and came running back, climbing over the ramparts with groans and ejaculations:

“Oh, little father, they are killed! Oh! little doves, they are dead!”

“Who are dead?”

“All are dead; we alone have escaped.”

Others merely climbed over silently and hid themselves in the trench.

“Back!” someone shouted to them.

But their groans grew louder. The panic, like a circle in the water, extended its area and stretched to the trenches. The men jumped from the banquettes and huddled together in the trench. In the meantime the braver ones were really fighting and dying at the front.

To judge by these returning men it appeared, at the first blush, that the attempt had proved abortive, and that an attack from the enemy could be expected instantly.

“To the breastworks, my men!” Skobelev gaily shouted. “Let us meet them as Russians should. To the breastworks, my men! Take aim, fire at the word of command. Hold your muzzles lower.”

A few shots were fired off from our trench, shots for which no order had been given; random shots, inspired by panic.

"Who was that shooting? He could hit our men. Our own comrades are over there."

"Brothers, what are you shooting down your comrades for?" a despairing cry was heard before the breastwork. This caused great excitement in the trenches on the left flank. On the right flank our fellows stood like men.

Minutes passed with the rapidity of seconds. The words of command were given in hoarse voices. Volleys of musketry resounded along the whole length of the enemy's line. A few grenades exploded behind us. A shrapnel burst over us like a bright star.

"Ah! these are not the men I had," Skobelev exclaimed despondently.

"Don't be disconsolate," said Kouropatkin; "the right flank and centre are still in perfect order."

A group of men came climbing over the breastwork.

"Where are you going to? Cowards!" was shouted at them.

"We are bringing in a wounded man," they answered gruffly, fiercely even.

Indeed, a plaintive voice could now be heard groaning in a heart-rending manner. The wounded man was brought down; but at that instant a company was marching up to reinforce our left flank. A disorderly mass of panic-stricken soldiers came running against them on their way to the right flank. The wounded

man slipped out of the hands of his bearers and fell on the ground; and in the dark the mass trampled over him. From underneath that mass of men proceeded the most piteous piercing groans and prayers. But whose business was it? Who cared? Each man was tearing along to try to get to a place of safety as quickly as possible. The voice could be heard gradually dying away: "Good God! Good God!" it murmured as it grew fainter and fainter. At last it could only gasp. The man had no more strength even to scream. But the frightened crowd kept passing over the unfortunate like an unconscious stream.

"Have you no hearts, you devils?" a voice roared at them.

The men came to their senses.

This panic on our left flank lasted for but a few minutes; but they seemed hours to us, so vividly was every detail of that terrible episode impressed on our minds. When those few minutes were over, order was again completely restored.

And it was only then that those returned who had really been into the enemy's trench and done their duty. Colonel Kashin was very much agitated and had lost his cap. This was what had taken place:

The two companies advanced up to within forty paces of the enemy without being noticed. When they had got so far the sentries fired two volleys at them. They gave a cheer and threw themselves on the ramparts. The Turks ran away in every direction, as though retreating before our attack. Our men jumped into the trench, bayoneted all they found, and, in

obedience to orders, took all the muskets that could be laid hold of, climbed back over the ramparts and lay down. At that moment one of the captains (there were two), Tzvitovitch, fell, and then jumped up again. A ball had gone through his leg. Under the influence of excruciating pain he momentarily lost consciousness and instinctively turned back. His sergeant-major overtook him and entreated him not to go away, as the whole company was retreating and following him. But Tzvitovitch could hear nothing.

In the meantime the other company lay still, awaiting the enemy. As soon as the Turks came on, our men poured their fire into them. But the hordes of the enemy grew and grew in numbers till there were clouds of them, covering the horizon. Retreat became necessary. The space between our trenches and the enemy's was covered with retreating Russian soldiers. The wounded were nearly all picked up. They brought two dead bodies. The enemy again took possession of his trench; the triumphant cry of "Allah!" resounded far and wide. Volleys were fired from thence. The second captain was also wounded. The men retreated slowly, firing as they retired, so as to prevent the enemy from executing a counter-shock; so far they had succeeded.

"Are all the wounded here?"

"Two have remained behind."

Bearers with litters were immediately sent after them.

The men who had just come in were told off to man the parallel lines, for it was expected that the

Turks would make an energetic attack, and men who had already felt fear would spread panic amongst the defenders of our trenches.

"Well, how did you come off?" Colonel Kashin was asked as he showed himself in the trench. He lifted up the sleeve of his uniform in reply. It was shot through.

"But your arm is all right?"

"Yes, my arm is all right. Oh! the cowards!"

"Who are cowards?"

"No; I mean, where is my cap?" he said, clasping his hands round his head.

"It is a mistake to think the affair has miscarried," a cool voice could be heard to say. "The men have done all they were told to do. They stormed the trenches, bayoneted whomsoever they found there, took some Turkish muskets, and came back. That was all that was wanted."

"I am afraid for the left flank," said Skobelev; "I shall go there."

Kouropatkin took over the right flank, the centre was left to Melnitzky. The trench was ready, the men were waiting. We had made a mistake. Intending to punish the Turks, we had only succeeded in provoking a determined attack. They were evidently preparing to fall on us in overpowering numbers. If we should succeed in chastising them we would ourselves be sufferers, and even if we should beat them back, the victory would cost us dearly. The question to whom the first ridge of the Zeleny Gory should belong was now going to be decided.

The enemy's volleys were approaching us nearer and nearer. The Turks were attacking us from all directions. Their numbers were enormous. I have never seen attacks in beautiful parade formation. These things are always done with great confusion. A group of decided men marches on in front, the others run about, retreat, and spread panic among the reserves. In this chaos everything happens in a fatalistic manner; things come about of themselves. Sometimes the attacking party think the action is lost when it is really won. Frequently the attacking force is abused by those left behind in the trenches, who can only judge of what is going on by the accounts of panic-stricken fugitives, and yet in the end the undertaking proves to have been well carried out. So it was on the night of the 3rd of November. Where were here the serried ranks of soldiers bravely charging in front of their banners picturesquely waving in the wind, as our artists love to paint battle-scenes?

Our men had scarcely time to jump on to the breast-work before the line of the enemy's fire opened upon them, within fifty paces of us on our right flank, within sixty on our left. Shouting and yelling like wild beasts the Turks came pouring down upon us; there were at least twelve hordes of them. They rushed on in a disorderly mass, showering thousands of bullets on us, which buzzed past our ears like swarms of bees. The fire was so great that it lighted up the faces of the enemy as well as their muskets. Simultaneously with them the guns from Krishin gave signs of life. Grenades tore through the air, moaning as they flew

past us and exploded far in our rear. The shrapnels also burst in the air far behind us, and illuminated the dark ravines in our rear. One grenade alone exploded in front of our battery, between it and the trenches, and carried six lives away with it. At that moment when, judging from the confusion caused by our last attack, we expected a disorderly, irregular defence, the coolness of the men in the trenches, their surprising self-possession and orderly behaviour, I confess, amazed me. What a difference there is between the defensive and the offensive! The very men who had but lately come running in stricken with panic fear, now stood coolly on the banquettes of the breastwork to receive the shock of the enemy's charge.

"Children, don't fire unless the word is given. Hold your muzzles lower," the officers said behind.

The enemy was getting close to us. The death-like stillness of our trenches did not seem to inspire the hordes with dread. Osman Pasha himself was with them. We could hear the Nizam's salutations and his encouraging words of command. The fire from the enemy's guns illuminated these hordes, and lighted up the whole attacking force. They were close to us, at the very trench. It was exciting to stand there face to face with them; but our men's feet seemed to have grown to the ground, they did not like to leave the breastwork.

"Company—fire!" was shouted in our ears.

A deafening volley followed the command.

"Company—fire!" was heard more to the right, and another deafening volley resounded over there.

The word of command seemed to be carried along our line and to die on our flanks.

“ Load, children, quickly ! ”

In the grey gunpowder-smoke we could see our men working nervously. In the course of six minutes four volleys had been fired off in the face of the advancing Turks. The word was given again, but it was responded to by only a few occasional shots.

“ What does this mean ? ”

“ The extractor won’t work,” one of the men complained.

Our muskets were defective. After the fourth volley the soldier might work and work away with his extractor, but the cartridge obstinately remained in the barrel, and had to be got out with the ram-rod. And thus in the very heat of action a great deal of precious time was lost.

The attack on the right flank was now within twenty paces of us. But now it was no longer by companies but by entire battalions that volleys were delivered. Skobeleff gave the word himself.

“ Battalion—fire ! ”

And a thousand shots flew into the chaos before us. A thousand bullets, from well-directed barrels, carried tens and hundreds of lives from the enemy’s ranks. A moment of silence ensued. Again we could hear the men worrying over their extractors. Loud moanings and groans resounded in front of us, in the darkness before the trenches, as though the whole neighbourhood had become vociferous. There were rushings, cries, and the noise and tumult of large masses of men retreating.

The attack had been repulsed. But not for any length of time. Five minutes had not elapsed before we could again hear the advancing avalanche about a hundred paces distant from us, when it halted.

“They are being drawn up for a fresh attack. I am afraid of a contingency. They may break down the ramparts. The situation would be serious. Each one of us may have to defend his own life personally. Let me advise you to get your revolvers ready,” Skobelev said.

The advice was followed. The nervous excitement grew. With feverish impatience we endeavoured to distinguish what was going on behind the black line of the breastwork, straining our eyes to the utmost. The plaintive bugles of the enemy sounded their signals, and a thick line of fire again burst through the darkness. This line came nearer and nearer. But it moved along much more rapidly than it did the first time. The Turks evidently relied on quickness for the success of this shock. We had many wounded who kept falling into the trench from the earthworks with hollow moans. One fellow was coming along staggering in his gait like a drunken man. When I came face to face with him I could see him put his hand to his chest, as though he wanted to keep hold of something there; and then I saw a stream flowing through his fingers, which in the darkness looked like ink. He did not even groan.

Our volleys were effective. This second attack was repulsed like the first.

“To-day,” said Skobelev, “they evidently have set

themselves the task of turning us out. They have never yet attacked us so obstinately. Probably we shall have a third attack upon us shortly. Oh!" he suddenly exclaimed, putting his hand up to his side.

We had only heard a sound as of a whisper near us.

"What has happened to you?" everyone asked.

"Speak less loudly—I am severely wounded." Skobelev pressed the palm of his hand against his side. Melnitzky supported him.

"No, let me go. This won't do! The men will see us," Skobelev whispered. "Good cheer, my men!" he shouted as loudly as he could; "I congratulate you for beating back the enemy so well."

"Glad to please you!" was shouted back.

"Mind, stand honourably! Serve Russia, my brothers! If he falls on us again, we will send him back a third time. Turks are canaille, are they not, my men?"

"Quite so, your Excellency!"

"Well, then, why should you be afraid of them?"

"Are you wounded?" said Grenkvist.

"Your Excellency, to your post! Whatever may happen, my men, stand well together, support each other, and, remember, sooner die in the trenches than give them up. All Russia is gazing on us."

The men near Skobelev gave a cheer which was re-echoed along the whole line.

"Oh! but how it hurts," Skobelev muttered under cover of the cheering.

"You had better retire to your tent."

"No. It would never do to let the men know I am

wounded. I will go to the left flank to encourage the men. Let us preserve this position. We have bought it with our blood. It has not been cheaply purchased."

It was certainly a moment of triumph. Had the Turks been a little more numerous and more determined that night, they might have thrown themselves into our trenches, and forced us to a hand-to-hand encounter. Of course we would have re-captured the trench, but at what a price!

"We won't give it up," the men shouted in reply to Skobelev.

He went along the trenches, and then, when he had shown himself everywhere he at length consented to retire to his tent. In the light Skobelev's face looked pale. His overcoat was taken off, he commenced to undress.

"But where is it?"

"Where is what?"

"Why there is no wound at all!" Kouropatkin joyously exclaimed.

"How do you mean, no wound?" The blood rushed to Skobelev's face.

"What I say. I felicitate you with having received a contusion."

Skobelev threw himself down on his bed.

"But how painful it was. I was afraid it had scratched me deeply. I must dress again quickly. It hurts, but there is nothing for it."

"Good cheer, my men! Thank you for your good behaviour to-day!" Skobelev was soon shouting in the trenches, amidst the noise and tumult of another attack

from the Turks. This time the attack was much fiercer than any that had preceded it, and directed chiefly against our flanks. Skobeleff, Melnitzky, and Kouropatkin hurried up to support them with reinforcements. Inexperienced captains made the men fire too rapidly, through which cause there was much worry with the extractors, and the volleys were not so thick. Just then the Turks fired a volley for the first time. As a rule they kept up a continuous fire; frequent, but not by volleys. However, it was a very unsuccessful attempt, and was not repeated.

A few more minutes and the attack was repulsed. The enemy retreated, not to renew the battle for that day, but kept firing on us from his trenches. Everyone was impatiently waiting, everyone was possessed with but one idea—what had been our losses? It would be well if we should prove to have lost two hundred men. At day-break the muster-roll was read, and it was discovered that the previous night had cost us one hundred and thirty killed and wounded.

CHAPTER XXII.

SKOBELEFF was remarkably just in his relations to his subordinates. He never ascribed the success of any action to his individual exertions, and never neglected an opportunity of mentioning his assistants. Whenever he was thanked he would, in private conversation as well as in official correspondence, reply to the effect that the success of the affair in question was not due to him, but had been brought about mainly through the instrumentality of such and such an one.

Under such circumstances he would frequently point to Kouropatkin as the cause of success, and in such sincere and hearty language that nobody could suppose for a moment that this was but the modesty of the victor.

"I thank you, brothers; it is you who have done all this! The orders I wear are yours by right, they have been given me for your brave deeds!" he would tell his men, and he did not say this merely to encourage them. He meant it; for he knew the enormous importance of the private soldier.

“A general can only prepare his men, educate them, and then choose his ground and direct the first blows of the battle. But after that his part is merely to mass his men, and to have his reserves ready. There is a moment in every action when chance rules supreme; when that moment has arrived no one has much influence. One can show an example of personal bravery, but this every officer can and should do. The masses do the work. They go unconsciously in a certain direction, they overpower the enemy. It is the masses who win the battle, and the merit of a general has nothing to do with it.”

Skobelev always made friends, and was even intimate, with his soldiers. And he was not even particular about their being his own; he made friends of those belonging to other divisions as well. This was not from a desire to make himself popular; it was a necessity to him. He felt he must study and learn the characters of his men. He did not content himself with conversations at bivouacs and in the trenches, but he would frequently join detachments on the march. Sometimes, when riding on horseback, the snow falling from the skies, the ground muddy and miry, the weather cold and damp, he would meet a detachment of men worn out with hunger and fatigue.

“Good cheer, my men!” he would exclaim. “Cossack, take my horse.”

And Skobelev would dismount and march along with the men. Conversation would commence at once. At first the men would be a little awkward and bashful; but the General would soon break the ice, and the

conversation then become perfectly frank and hearty; and chatting thus they would reach their destination. Each of these soldiers carried with them the memory of the White General's simplicity and good-nature, of his love for the rough grey cloak which covered the unknown but stubborn strength of our private soldier, and he would tell his comrades. Thus the whole army, before it knew Skobelev, loved him already and repaid him his love with theirs.

Or else he would meet a party of "young soldiers" just joined.

"Good cheer, my men!"

"We wish your Excellency good health."

"What fine fellows you are! Regular eagles! Have you just come from Russia?"

"Just so, your Excellency."

"I am sorry you are not coming to me. What is your name? Ah! you will get the St. George at the next action, I am sure. Eh? Will you try to get it?"

"Yes, I'll get it, your Excellency."

"Ah! I see you are a fine fellow. Would you like to join my division?"

"I should."

"Put down his name. I will ask him to be placed in my division."

And they would commence chatting. He would exchange a few words with each of them, and find something hearty and cheerful to say to all.

"Even to die with Skobelev must be jolly," they used to say; "he knows and sees all our wants."

And he certainly did see and know them. He would have nothing to say to the commissariat, and frequently refused to admit them to his presence. The commanding officers of companies and battalions were expected to look after the provisioning of their men.

"But they may embezzle," a partisan of the commissariat department once suggested.

"Who—the commanding officers? That is no business of mine."

"But how no business of yours?"

"Of course not. If my men get as much bread and meat, tea, and brandy as they want; if there are no complaints lodged against my officers; if the inhabitants of the district are satisfied, let them embezzle. What do I care?"

Indeed, his men were fed better than anywhere else; his division had fewer men on the sick list than in any other; and after the passage of the Balkans, and the two days' battle at Sheynoff, Skobelev's division passed under review before the Commander-in-Chief in splendid condition, whilst the other divisions looked pale and starved. The Grand Duke exclaimed, on seeing them:

"What red-faced fellows! One can see *they* are well-filled. Thank God that some, at least, do not look like corpses!"

In return, his men understood and valued his care.

When they were asked by strange generals what division or regiment they belonged to, they simply replied:

"We are Skobelev's, your Excellency!"

They did not add the number of their division or the name of their regiment. That answer they considered quite satisfactory; and pride could be detected in the tones in which the words were uttered, a sense of personal worth, and a consciousness of the privilege they had earned with their blood under that illustrious leader.

Skobelev's were men of a special stamp, they were quite a peculiar type in the army. They walked differently and held themselves differently from the rest; they talked, too, with ease, and answered questions without growing confused, and in every respect comported themselves as behoves men of dignity and self-respect. "What cocks are these! What proud dons!" those exclaimed who did not yet know them. They treated men in other divisions, even the guards, with a certain air of condescension; they were dressed better, and took greater care of their person, their morale could not have been better. When Adrianople was taken, no single case of theft or violence occurred during the first week. Later, when other divisions came to relieve Skobelev's, a different régime set in. Skobelev likewise treated his prisoners better than the other generals did. His own men shared their food with them.

"They are soldiers like ourselves," Skobelev would say, "only they are unlucky ones. They should be treated kindly. Show your enemy no mercy as long as he has a weapon in his hand; but as soon as he has surrendered and become your prisoner, he should be your friend and brother. Stint yourself in food rather

than make him suffer ; he wants it more. Take care of him as you would of yourself."

This care was especially conspicuous after the battle of Sheynovo, when the prisoners were distributed amongst one company, and messed with the men at the camp-kettles. I have a striking illustration before my mind.

When the white flag had been hoisted on the Sheynovo hill, Skobelev galloped in the direction of the round redoubt. He was met by a party of prisoners. One of their convoy gave a prisoner a blow with the butt-end of his musket. Skobelev was beside himself with rage.

"What manners are these?" he demanded of the officer in charge. The officer approached Skobelev and drew himself up. "I will take your sword from you ; you are a disgrace to the Russian army! What are you in charge for? You should be ashamed of yourself, Sir! Your men actually beat their prisoners! What the devil does it mean?"

The officer muttered something in excuse.

"Silence, Sir!" and he put spurs into his horse. I thought he was going to ride the officer down. "And you excuse yourself, too! There are circumstances under which it is impossible to make prisoners—when your force is small, and prisoners might prove dangerous, then it is a sad necessity which forces us to shoot them. Do you hear? They are shot; but they are not beaten. Only ruffians and good-for-nothings are capable of such atrocities. An officer who can calmly look on and see such things perpetrated, cannot

be tolerated. You are a hangman. What is your name ? ”

The officer gave it.

“ I do not advise you ever to come under my command. And you—how could you beat a prisoner ? ” he said, flying at the private. “ You did him the honour of fighting with him with the same weapons as his—he is as much a soldier as you are—and because fate is against him, because strength and success are on your side, you beat him ! ”

Skobelev always took care of his prisoners, fed and sheltered them, except at Plevna. Here he took 40,000 prisoners at one blow, and under those circumstances, when the victualling of our men caused serious anxiety, nothing was done for the prisoners; the Commander-in-Chief handed them over to Skobelev's father, and on this subject father and son had frequent disagreeables together. Skobelev, junior, who was military governor of Plevna, was continually asking his father :

“ What are you going to feed your Turks on to-day ? ”

“ What business is that of yours ? ”

“ Have you sent off one leg of mutton to feed 40,000 men with ? ”

“ Mind your own affairs. I shall not ask you what to do.”

“ Well, I have nothing to give them myself. Do you know, Father, what I would advise you to do in the interests of the morality and discipline of the Turkish prisoners confided to your care ? ”

“What?”

“Throw a sheep among them. They will fall on it and try to tear it to pieces. Then take back the sheep to punish them for their disorder. By these means you will save your sheep, and the Turks will have no right to complain; they will have themselves to blame.”

He proposed to place them in their own redoubts, where they would have found shelter from the snow and frost; but, for some reason or other, his proposal was not adopted.

Deserters from the Turkish camp often came in to him, and he always had them well fed before he sent them on.

When the fourth act of the tragedy of Plevna was over, and Plevna fell, the Roumanians threw themselves into the town and commenced sacking it. As soon as Skobelev was appointed governor, he called the Roumanian officers to him and said:

“Gentlemen, I must inform you at once, so as to prevent quarrels hereafter, your men are sacking the town.”

“We are the victors, and victors have the right to dispose of the property of the vanquished.”

“Well, in the first place, we are not at war with the peaceable inhabitants of this town, and, consequently, cannot have conquered them. But, secondly, please acquaint your men that I shall have victors of that sort shot. Every man caught marauding shall be shot like a dog; please bear this in mind. There is another thing. Your men insult women. This is very humiliating. Let me tell you, that every com-

plaint shall be investigated, and every case of outrage punished."

The Turks called this just.

"He makes no distinction," they said, "between his own people and strangers. If they are peaceable, he will not allow them to be insulted."

One thing they did not like. Why did he give his prisoners over to the charge of the Bulgarian militia? But Skobelev explained his reasons for doing so very clearly:

"Till now the Bulgarians have been slaves. They must be made to feel that they have become citizens and warriors. I have ordered them to convey their former masters to prison, not because I wish the latter to feel all the pangs of defeat, but because I want the former to realise their new independence and equality with us."

At Plevna we found large quantities of the Turkish sick and wounded. Some of them were dying, some had died already, some gave hopes of recovery. The Bulgarians had smashed the doors and windows of their hospitals, and Osman Pasha himself did not pay them much attention.

"When one has to fight, there is no time to physic," he said. "Sick and wounded are a useless burden; they are of no use to the Sultan and to Turkey. It is better they should die quickly. We have quite enough to do without them."

Skobelev showed a very different spirit. He immediately had hygienic stations erected, and collected a large staff of doctors and attendants to look after the

Turks. When he had inspected the mosques in which the wounded Turks were housed, they said :

“ We now see that it is better in your army than in ours. Your Akh-Pasha visits friends and enemies alike, but Osman Pasha did not visit even us.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON the day of the last battle of Plevna, Skobelev received orders to take the Brigade of Guards under his command. According to the original idea, this brigade was to have formed part of the reserves. When Skobelev received the order, however, and the Brigade of Guards, together with the 16th Division, were ordered to advance, the enemy ceased firing on the field of action, and quiet reigned where the battle had been raging, and Skobelev was informed that the Turkish army had surrendered. The Brigade of Guards and the 16th Division were therefore ordered to halt.

This created considerable jealousy, and the commanding officer of the Guard's Brigade sent in a report to head-quarters, complaining of Skobelev, and stating that he had refused to give the Guards an opportunity for distinguishing themselves, and pushed on his own 16th Division to the detriment of the other forces.

When Skobelev was interrogated on this subject, his answer was simple:

“ In the first place, the 16th Division took no part in

the action; and secondly, I consider the great aim of a leader should be to spare his men as much as possible: to arrive at great results with small numbers—that is the task I have always set myself. And besides, had Osman suddenly attempted to force his way through us and effect a retreat—for every eventuality must be taken into consideration—it would have been very awkward not to have had fresh troops immediately at my disposal. Such a contingency is not chimerical. At Marengo, for instance, Melas broke through the French lines at every point. The Austrians thought the victory theirs. Melas gave over the command of his victorious army and the pursuit of the French to Zach, and rode off to Alexandria to write a despatch on the complete defeat of the enemy. Napoleon himself thought the battle lost; but Desaix exclaimed, ‘We have lost one battle, let us commence another!’ He had a division of 9,000 men, which was quite fresh. Had he pitted them against the Austrians at once, they would have been completely crushed, but he retreated. Even a triumphal march must succumb to distance. After a few miles the Austrians got blown, then Desaix took Marengo. The Austrians had formed into marching columns, and when they came up to Marengo, Desaix attacked them with a consul’s guard, and completely routed the late victors, so that the despatch on the defeat of the enemy came to be written by Napoleon instead of by his opponent. In actions of this kind, a fresh concentrated reserve must always be kept at disposal to decide the victory in case of need. If I had had time to lead the 16th Division and the Guards

into action, I should have had no reserves left. Nevertheless, if I had been ordered to do so, I would have done it. In such matters it is not the business of a subordinate to criticise; although, of course, there are men who cannot long remain subordinates—they develop the military eye too soon, and penetrate the mistakes of their superiors. How can they, then, be expected to carry out their orders?”

On the occasion of his first meeting with Osman Pasha, Skobelev gave him a hearty and cordial welcome.

“I am proud to make the acquaintance of the brilliant Turkish general, whose valour and genius I have so much admired and envied during this siege.”

Osman replied :

“The Russian general is yet young, but his fame is great. He will soon be the field-marshal of his army, and will prove that others may envy him, but that he has no reason to envy others.”

At Plevna Skobelev occupied a small house. During the first days of occupation, the Emperor Alexander II. expressed a wish to lunch with Skobelev on his way to a review of the Corps of Grenadiers. He arrived at twelve. The General was invited to join at the luncheon. As master of the house, he only superintended the arrangements. At first Skobelev regarded this as a sign of Imperial displeasure, but the Emperor turned to him and said :

“Show me thy house. You, gentlemen, need not accompany us.”

Skobelev led him through his apartments, when the Emperor suddenly embraced and kissed him.

“I thank thee, Skobelev, for all thou hast done! For thy good service! Many, many thanks!” and he kissed him again.

Skobelev valued His Majesty's favour highly. In the present instance, he understood the Emperor, and was grateful for the consideration he had shown. For any manifestation of Imperial favour in public would have made Skobelev even more enemies than he possessed already. He had quite enough of these, especially as he was a great favourite with the Grand Duke Commanding-in-Chief.

There was no rest for Skobelev at Plevna. Preparations were on foot for the passage of the Balkans, and one of the most important posts in that brilliant episode of the war was assigned to him. He was continually writing to head-quarters, making preparations, and completing the equipment of his men. At the same time, he had to bring order into the newly-occupied town, to find accommodation for the Turks who returned to it, and to pacify them with the inhabitants. Though he did not stand on ceremony with respect to the last point, those who ill-treated the Turks were severely punished.

“Remember,” he told his men, “these are no longer your enemies; they are your friends. For the present they are as much subjects of the Emperor as you. And for that reason it is your duty to defend them, as if they were your own relations. Who insults them will find he has to do with me, which I do not advise anyone to have.”

His unique relaxation was at dinner, and then he

entertained the most variegated public. Here were the epaulettes and aiguillettes of generals, and the simple overcoats of some officer of the line who had happened into Plevna; the velvet collar of Intelligence Department was seen side by side with the ragged frock of a volunteer private, the black coats of newspaper correspondents, and the fur-lined jacket of some Bulgarian. But this was not the only peculiar feature of Skobelev's circle. Here everyone felt the spirit of comradeship. There was no distinction shown to any, no particular attention paid. The noise of conversation was always going on. Anyone who liked could talk or reply. The half-educated cornet of Cossacks felt as much at home as did Lignitz, one of the most refined and intelligent of the Prussian officers despatched to the theatre of war.

"This is a sort of eating-house here," Skobelev's father said chaffingly one day, as he entered his son's dining-room.

From every tour of inspection of Plevna, Skobelev returned with quite a tail of guests. An officer accidentally met, an orderly, a Mars of a field paymaster, all were attracted to the seat of responsible government—or, rather, to dinner.

"There is a place for everyone at my table," Skobelev would say; and his guests, squeezing up a little, made room for the new arrivals.

In the face of such catholic hospitality, no unimportant post was assigned to Joseph, a typical adventurer, who had been all over the globe, and had arrived at Skobelev's camp a month ago on a donkey, and who,

a month later, rode away again on the same animal. He was half-French, half-Italian, born at Cairo, educated at Brussa ; he had been cook at Tunis, had later opened a restaurant at Varna. Having failed to pay his creditors at Varna, he fled to India. Here he pursued some mysterious avocations, and finally got to Roumania, from whence he appeared as Skobeleff's cook. He was a sort of merry-andrew, who amused everyone, from the General to his man. When Skobeleff was in the Zeleny Gory trenches, this Vatel never once ventured to visit his master, but sent him his food by Cossacks. When the Turks commenced to bombard Brestovetz perseveringly, Joseph lost his head completely. Wishing to have a joke with him, Skobeleff ordered him to put in an appearance in the trenches. Joseph replied :

“Tell the General that if he orders me to go to that stupid place, I shall take my portmanteau and my donkey, and send him my adieus.”

A little later he sent the following message :

“*Mon Général*, I am bored with Turkish bullets and your Russian soldiers, who sleep and snore most rudely midst exploding grenades, *comme des ours*. This did not enter into our agreement, and I must therefore request your Excellency to take measures to prevent the Turks from bombarding my kitchen ; for I am an independent man, and have no desire to die.”

Another time, when Skobeleff himself arrived at Brestovetz, Monsieur Joseph had an interview with him.

“I have come, *mon Général*, to know whether you

have made any arrangements with the enemy to prevent their bombarding my kitchen ? ”

“ I opened negotiations, but Osman Pasha desires me to send you to him, so that he can talk the matter over with you personally. Hold yourself in readiness. Tomorrow your eyes will be bandaged, and——”

“ I don’t consent. I cannot be an envoy. I do not wish it *enfin*. ”

“ Your eyes will be bandaged, and you shall be sent to Plevna. ”

“ I shall protest. I shall appeal to all Europe to witness——”

But Monsieur Joseph was interrupted by loud peals of laughter from his hearers, and understood that he was only being joked with.

“ You are a coward, Monsieur Joseph. ”

“ Valour was not included in my contract. ”

When Plevna fell, Monsieur Joseph again exposed himself to ridicule. He again sought an interview of Skobelev.

“ I have come to demand my due, ” and Joseph put on a desperate look.

“ What may that be ? ”

“ I have been under fire for a month. My kitchen was specially selected by the enemy as an aim—nothing is sacred to them. But I held out. You at Zeleny Gory, and I here at Brestovetz. And for that reason I should receive a decoration. ”

“ What decoration ? ”

“ The Cross of St. George, of course, which is given to all brave men. ”

“ Yes, but valour was not stipulated for in our agreement.”

“ If it had been stipulated for, you should have paid me for it; but as it is not in our agreement, I demand an order. You have given orders to those bears of soldiers; I want one too.”

“ You must have gone out of your mind, Joseph ! ”

“ *Mon Général*, I have an ancient mamma at Cairo—rejoice her heart ! If she sees me with a decoration on my breast, she will forgive me the indiscretions of my youth.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

SKOBELEFF never gave orders to servants. In other divisions the valets and coachmen of the various generals strutted about in all the bravery of crosses and decorations; but in Skobelev's division this was never the case. Kroukovsky, Skobelev's own man, who lived with him in the trenches, never dared even to think of such a distinction. Once he forgot himself so far as to hint at something of the sort.

"Enter the ranks and earn it. No Crosses of St. George are given for cleaning boots."

Indeed, generally speaking, crosses were really earned under fire.

Usually, when crosses were granted by vote, the men, instead of electing the bravest, chose the richest and most influential of the volunteer-privates. But Skobelev refused to give his countenance to such practice. This is how it would happen.

"Have you elected your candidates, my men?" Skobelev would say, riding up.

"Yes, your Excellency."

“Well, whom have you chosen?”

“Sergeant-major X stands first,” the captain would read out, “then volunteer-private Y.”

“Look here, my men; I will tell you what it is. The crosses should not be awarded to sergeant-majors, but to those who really deserve them. Do you hear? To the bravest. Have you understood me?”

“Yes, your Excellency.”

“Very well, then, choose again in my presence. ‘Gentlemen,’ — to the officers — ‘you had better retire. Leave the men to themselves.’”

“If, after a second election, the names were the same, Skobelev would say:

“Mind, it would be very dishonourable to leave your bravest men undecorated. Choose again.”

And if the result of the third election proved the same as the first, then he gave the crosses to the sergeant-major and the influential soldiers.

Once on an occasion of this sort, when Skobelev asked the men whom they had chosen, the captain came up and said:

“I have nominated So-and-so and So-and-so.”

“And what right have you to do so? You are the captain. Why do you interfere in what is not your business? From henceforth you must not dare to nominate candidates. The election of candidates is a sacred thing, and should be left entirely to the men.”

Sometimes, when sergeant-majors and volunteer-privates were re-elected, Skobelev would recommend them for decoration, and would have simple privates elected.

“Or else,” he said, “they will never get anything!”

Skobelev looked upon the St. George's Cross from a very serious point of view.

“It is most important that they should not be awarded to sharpers, or to cautious players. Sometimes fellows will rush into the very thick of the fight when the general is looking, and so get their cross. Otherwise they hide behind others. Those are sharpers. Cautious players are such officers who are very brave and daring until they have got their cross, after which they will calm down and commence reposing in camp and otherwise taking care of their precious lives. That is just the same as if a gambler had made a lucky *coup* and gone home. The St. George's Cross is an obligation; he who wears it on his breast should show an example to the rest. His place in action is at the front.”

And Skobelev's “knights” shared his views. During action, in critical moments, when the human herd required leaders, they would shout: “Georgians to the front! Knights, show us the way!”

And thus it frequently happened that the silver cross was but the messenger, the fore-runner, of a wooden one. In every action it was the Knights of St. George who were the first to fall.

“Why did not you give the cross to So-and-so?” Skobelev was frequently asked.

“Why, indeed! My Kroukovsky deserves one more than he does. He has been in the trenches with me, at least.”

“But a soldier's cross! What does it cost?”

"It costs something, if my men risk their lives for it. Let them give crosses to unworthy subjects in other divisions, but I will not countenance such immorality."

Skobeleff took a particular pleasure in going out into the open space between our trenches and those of the enemy, to wash. Kroukovsky's duty was to assist him in this operation. Of course the Turks instantly commenced firing.

"Your Excellency! I say, your Excellency!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Don't you think it would be better to perform your toilette in the trenches?"

"This suits me just as well. Would you like me to put you on sentry duty here for cowardice?"

Kroukovsky gave no answer.

"Why don't you speak?"

"No, I should not."

"But I will post you here all the same."

"And who is to serve your Excellency? Who——?"

"Well, get away, you coward."

And Kroukovsky ran away, rejoiced to be permitted to seek refuge from the enemy's fire.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE preparations for the passage of the Balkans went on without interruption. From the day of the entrance into Plevna to the day of departure the division never rested. The muskets were cleaned, and for this purpose all the oil to be had in Plevna was bought up. But our muskets were no good, and so Skobelev conceived the happy idea of arming at least one battalion with the excellent Peabody-Martini rifle, of which there were many in the Plevna arsenal. This created great commotion in many circles.

"It is a disgrace," some shouted, "to arm Russians with Turkish rifles!"

But Skobelev quietly persisted in his plan, and fitted out the rifle-battalion of the Ouglitzky Regiment with this arm.

"If there had been sufficient ammunition I would have fitted out the artillery with Turkish guns as well. I hold it no disgrace to take from the enemy whatever he may have that is good. The whole question is one of doing him as much harm as possible."

"In that case, perhaps, you would march under Turkish flags as well," was the rejoinder.

"Your analogy is not a happy one! flags are not weapons."

"There is no precedent in history for such action."

"There you are mistaken"; and he instantly produced a string of references to prove that great generals had frequently taken this step. "If we have not got a thing, why should we not take it from the enemy? Suppose we have no bread, should we refuse to take advantage of the enemy's stores because they are not ours? I mean to copy everything that is practical. I shall even abolish the knapsacks."

"Then you will make regular Turks of your men?"

"I am always ready to learn. If I were at war with the Chinese, and found they had some practical arrangements, I would adopt them. Why not?"

Indeed, the heavy knapsacks were abolished, and replaced by light linen bags, which proved much more convenient in every respect. Boots, overcoats, and flannels were purchased whenever they could be got hold of. Three weeks in advance pack-saddles were ordered, and inexhaustible supplies of biscuits, groats, &c. were got ready, little barrels were filled with spirit. Every possible preparation was made, and the great merit of it all was that it was done quite independently of the commissariat. The invariable reply of the commissariat officials on being ordered to send in any supplies was:

"We have nothing!"

Our General's foresight went so far as to purchase

sixty head of horned cattle for each regiment. They were to carry the baggage and provisions into the mountains, and then they were themselves to serve as food. The other generals of division, on arriving at any new neighbourhood, demanded provision and transport. The inhabitants, who had been put under requisition before, proved unable to satisfy their demands. Thus the movement of our troops was retarded, and the biscuits were consumed. But in Skobelev's division the provision transported itself. Skobelev's care for his men went so far, indeed, that he bought up all the vinegar and acids to be got at Plevna, all the boots, all the leather, all the sheepskins. During the march Skobelev continually watched that his men had their hot meals every day. In the sleet, on the heights of the Balkans, when entire regiments of other divisions were frozen to death, Skobelev's men had soup and meat in plenty! Another precaution was taken which caused much mirth at first. Skobelev ordered every one of his men to carry a log of dry wood.

"What folly will he think of next?"

"If Skobelev has ordered it," the Commander-in-Chief said, "he is sure to have some reason for it."

And he was right. When the men reached the heights of the Balkans these dry logs of wood made splendid camp-fires. By other divisions the trees which grew on the heights were cut down. They proved damp, smoked, and would neither burn nor become charcoal. Skobelev had a lot of charcoal at once, and at night the men lay round it and fell asleep compara-

tively warm and comfortable. Not a single man was frozen!

“Take new boots with you!” Skobeleff enjoined his men on the day they marched out of Plevna.

The passage of the Balkans was so well organised and so successfully executed that, although occasional halts were made in villages on the road, the population did not suffer in any single instance from our march.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE soldiers of Skobelev's and Radetzky's divisions became great friends in the defiles of Yantra. They considered each other mutually worthy of associating together.

Skobelev and Radetzky were, indeed, mutually necessary one to the other at that time. Skobelev, all dash and daring, full of resource; Radetzky, patient, wisely cautious, calculating. Both were alike brave, both equally popular with their men. Later, at Geok Teppé, Skobelev also developed the caution and calculation of a strategist, whereby his military reputation rose immensely. The difference between these two great leaders was best displayed at Gabroff. Skobelev, who knew the situation perfectly, was impatient to cross the Balkans and march on Adrianople. Radetzky was against this plan. A winter campaign across mountains and heights, through defiles filled with snow, through which it was difficult to make a way even in summer, deterred him. He wrote and telegraphed incessantly to head-quarters, entreating that the expedition might

be abandoned because it was, he thought, impracticable, impossible. He pointed out that the enemy would be forced to retreat of his own accord as soon as Gourko had beaten Souleyman, and that Weyssil-Pasha could have no object in remaining in his eagles'-nests in the mountains and allowing the Russian General to attack him in the rear. But the General lost sight of the fact that the retreating Turks would entrench themselves at Adrianople, and that in that case all hope of bringing the war to a speedy termination would be gone. Radetzky's *entourage* were of his opinion. The chief of his staff, the brave and admirable General Dmitroffsky, told us frankly that we would either all of us perish in the plains of Kazanlik, or else not even reach them, but perish in the mountains. When the probability of our being obliged to retreat was mentioned to Skobelev, he replied:

"There will be no possibility of a retreat under any circumstances whatever! The way I intend going is one you can descend by, but by which it will be impossible to ascend and return."

"But what will you do in an extreme case?"

"I shall march in front of my men, slap up to the Turkish position, and shall take mount St. Nicholas by storm, or perish. There is no choice in the matter."

The Commander-in-Chief favoured Skobelev's plan, and the passage was decided on. On the same day Skobelev issued the following general order, which is given *in extenso*:—

"We have a difficult feat before us, a feat worthy

of the constant and tried glory of the Russian flag. To-day, soldiers, we commence the passage of the Balkans with our artillery, without roads, cutting our own path, in the face of the enemy, across deep snow-drifts. In the mountains a Turkish army awaits us. It dares to bar us the way. Remember, brothers, that the honour of our country is confided to us; that the Tsar, the Emancipator, is himself now praying for us, and with him all Russia. They expect victory from us. Let neither the numbers nor the obstinacy, nor yet the fierceness of the enemy shake you in your determination to do your duty. Our cause is sacred; God is on our side.

“Bulgarian legionaries, you know why the Russian armies have been graciously sent to Bulgaria. From the first you have shown yourselves worthy of the sympathy of the Russian people. In the battles of July and August you have earned the love and confidence of your comrades-in-arms, our soldiers. Let it be so in future battles as well. You are fighting for the freedom of your country, for the preservation of the sanctity of your family hearth, for the honour of your mothers, sisters, and wives; for all that is dear and holy on earth. God wills you to be heroes!”

When this general order was read out to the men in the face of the enormous mountains, the tops of which disappeared in the heavens covered in snow-clouds, a loud and hearty cheer thundered through the ranks, which one must have heard to form an idea of. Along those dizzy heights narrow grey ribands could be

descried; these were the roads along which we were to travel; they disappeared in the mists of the evening. Further on there were no roads at all.

"We shall be surrounded by precipices and abysses," Skobelev said. "We are going where the wild beasts even have not penetrated."

"We will follow you!" the men shouted in reply to their beloved leader.

"My eagles! Storms shall not turn us from our path. There are no barriers to our advance!"

"And there shall not be any, your Excellency!"

"That's right. It is easy to live and to die with you, my men. We will show them that the Russian soldier cares neither for mountains nor snow-storms; nothing can stop him."

"Hurrah!" proceeded from ten thousand voices.

The tears came into Skobelev's eyes.

"With such soldiers anyone can do wonders," he said, turning to his staff. "Look at those faces. Is anything impossible for them? Thank you, comrades; I am proud to command you!" and he took off his cap and bowed to them.

A still louder cheer greeted his last speech, and resounded through the caves and dells of the neighbouring mountains. And yet the difficulties that lay before us were perfectly clear to every single soldier, and very soon their cheerfulness changed into the serious determined look of men preparing to undertake a difficult and painful task. The passage of the Balkans, which so great a military authority as Moltke had declared impossible, will receive a permanent niche in

history. Skobeleff's men may say with pride that they achieved it without any losses, thanks to the excellent organisation of the campaign. After mounting the first hill they saw before them an immense wall of rock. The wind having blown away the snow with which it had been but recently covered, there remained nothing but the steep and frowning rock. The men slipped and fell from it, bringing down in their train clattering camp-kettles, guns, and trenching tools. When they at length succeeded in reaching the heights they breathed with difficulty, leaned against the trunks of trees to rest, or simply laid themselves down in the snow, worn out and helpless. Falling and slipping as they did continually, they tried in vain to help themselves up with their hands, but these only slipped along the smooth surface. And when they had reached the summit they found another steep wall frowning down upon them. But this was covered with deep snow. They sank up to their chests in the loose mass of this snow as they bravely pushed forward. They wound their way now to the right, now to the left, then turned back again to avoid the yawning precipices which abounded amongst these wild rocks. They climbed up the steps formed by their feet on the snow, and then fell again down these steps, slipping down the ice into which the steps had turned. The foot-paths through the mountainous forests were so narrow that the men had to go in single file. They rested after every twenty-five or thirty paces. And what paces they were! Each man had to strain to lift up his foot out of the snow into which it had sunk,

then stretched it forward and it sank again into a soft mass. Sometimes the snow slipped away under their feet, their legs spread out apart, they fell down, gnashing their teeth as they rose again. A sort of rattling noise was heard on all sides. As they fell, the men bit and ate the snow on the ground. In the thickets bushes had to be bent on one side, some of the branches of which forced themselves into the men's faces and scratched them, and tore their clothes into rags. It was torture for the artillery. Ten-pounders were thrown down. To take them could not even be thought of. Mountain-guns on sledges, the gun-carriages taken separately, were pulled along with ropes; the men, their heads bent down, dragged the ropes after them, groaning as they went. The most trying of all was to climb up the mountains after slipping down. Some made an ascent five or six times, and always with the same want of success. An abyss gaped round them. They had to creep along like flies. Then they got into snow-drifts in which they sank up to their necks. They could no longer walk; they had to push and force a way by the sheer weight of their bodies. They got wet through. And as soon as the drift was passed the frost lighted on them, froze their overcoats, turned their shirts into the consistency of wood, changed their hair into lumps of ice. Fatigued and weary, they sat down to rest on rocks of ice; but these immediately rolled away down the steep inclines again. At last they threw themselves down on the road, and those behind them marched over them, trampled on their faces and chests; but they never complained, but rose

again and again and pushed on till their strength should completely fail them. Sometimes the snow would give way beneath them and the men would fall to the bottom of some deep ditch. It was an arduous march!

Skobelev was with them through it all; encouraging one, taunting another, laughing at a third, and helping all. Where did he get the strength to do it? He must have been more fatigued than any of the others, for he had no rest at all. Once he fell asleep in the snow; a circle of soldiers was immediately formed round him, to prevent him from being trampled on.

"This is an impossible undertaking!" someone said to him.

"All the better."

"How so?"

"Because in that case the Turks will not expect us. A leader on the defensive should always dread so-called impossible positions. Positions impossible to storm or surround, those he should always have in view."

"Generally, no attention is paid them."

"And that is a very stupid custom. A clever enemy will turn his attention to these in the first instance. All depends on the soldiers. To such soldiers as mine impossibilities do not exist."

At one small plateau the men lost heart. Fatigue had reached its limits. They felt they could not move another step.

"Another hill, my doves!" said Skobelev.

"It is hard work; we are tired, your Excellency," they pleaded.

“ You shall have porridge when you get to the top. Now, then, make an effort for me, my comrades ! ”

And the men rose and marched with renewed strength.

They reached their first night's quarters at Vitropol, and there they found soup and porridge ready. They dug up the snow till they got to the earth, made camp-fires with the logs of wood which they had brought with them, and cooked their supper. Meat and groats for this purpose they had carried with them. That night, notwithstanding the frost, there was not a single man on the sick-list.

The next day the same laborious march lay before them, only this time they were exposed to the fire of the Turkish lines. Here there was nothing like a road at all, there were not even the tracks of wild beasts. A steep perpendicular wall of rock rose before them, a steaming abyss yawned beneath. Yesterday birds alone could fly through these mountain fastnesses; to-day, a whole army fully equipped was passing them. The Oural Cossacks constructed a path at night. They lay down on the snow and crawled along, pressing it as they went. They then walked back, still stamping down the snow, and then led their horses over it. Along this cornice the army passed. On their right the mountain rose like a wall into the sky, on their left it descended perpendicularly down into unfathomable depths. The abyss seemed to draw one down; the men got sick and giddy. Two men fell down; they were irrevocably lost. In some parts the path sloped downwards. At these points the men must

have managed to keep their footing by a miracle. No other explanation is possible. To this moment I cannot understand how it is they did not perish here. And whilst a large portion of the army was still slowly winding its way at the side of this mountain, Skobelev was already reconnoitring at the front in the direction of Imitto. A horse was again shot under him, and Kouropatkin was wounded. Every step that we advanced here was taken in the teeth of the enemy.

“God only knows where he gets his coolness from,” said his officers.

For, standing on a projection of a mountain under a heavy fire from the enemy, Skobelev was calmly taking a sketch of the Valley of Roses. He wanted to do this particularly, as it was very important for him to know the formation of the ground. He was going to give battle to-morrow, and the slightest inequality in the surface of the ground would be of the greatest importance.

“He draws under fire as carefully and beautifully as if he were sitting in his study.”

The heroic passage of the Balkans, the battles of the 26th and 27th of December, and the occupation of Imitto, did not break Skobelev's energy. On the night of the 27th I found him in the pass leading to Kazanlik. He was lying near a camp-kettle, slightly wrapped in his cloak. In his immediate vicinity an expiring horse was struggling in the last throes of its death agony. The scream of some wounded soldier resounded in the neighbourhood. Someone was talking to him.

“Yes,” he said moodily, “to-morrow, or the day

after to-morrow, our fate will be decided. We shall either add another victory to our military annals, or—die! A glorious death is even more honourable than a victory easily purchased. In any case, there is no retreat. We could descend; we cannot ascend again. General Stolyetoff, take two companies of the Kazan Regiment, and one of the Ouglitzky Regiment. Turn the Turks out of Imitto and take it.”

“You should sleep now,” a voice murmured.

“Cossack, my horse! I have no time to sleep. I shall sleep at Kazanlik.”

And he rode off to reconnoitre the mouth of the pass leading into the plain.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE battle of the 28th December was the last great action of the period of 1877-78, and it was here that Turkey lost her last army.

It was damp and foggy on that glorious day. The distance was wrapped in fog; a grey sky seemed to crush the summits of the Balkans; fog smoked in the defiles; the gardens and trees growing in the Valley of Roses looked like clouds in the gloom.

The day was only just shyly breaking in the east when Skobelev rode over the Sheynovo field. The soldiers rose at sunrise; the rumbling of artillery along the hard frozen road could be just heard from Imitto. The Souzdal Regiment was still in the Balkans, like the majority of our artillery, with the exception of a few batteries of mountain guns. A battalion of rifles and two Bulgarian legions were also still in the mountains.

The sun had scarcely sent forth its rays before our regiments were already drawn up. The men were in excellent spirits, and very excited. Skobelev, knowing

the superstition of his men, addressed them as follows, as he rode along the ranks:

“I congratulate you, my men. To-day is just the sort of day for a victory—the 28th. Remember, it was on the 28th that we took the Zeleny Gory, on the 28th Plevna surrendered, and to-day we mean to make prisoners the last Turkish army. Eh, my men? We’ll do it, won’t we?”

“We’ll take them—hurrah!”

“I thank you in advance, brothers.”

At ten o’clock Count Tolstoy’s brigade had already taken up its position in the van, and drawn itself up in line of battle.

“Advance under cover of good musketry fire,” Skobelev ordered him.

Skobelev commanded the centre. As usual, he was surrounded by the officers of his staff, orderlies, &c.; behind him floated the standard which had followed him everywhere, from Fagan to Khiva, from Khiva to Plevna. Amidst death-like silence our mountain guns opened fire on the Turkish cavalry which was deploying before Sheynovo. The enemy had fifteen guns. Their concentrated fire was directed exclusively at the group of which Skobelev was the centre.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “will you please stand a little more apart—distribute yourselves a little more. Otherwise, we shall be all blown to pieces. To-day my life is wanted,” he added in apology. “Kouropatkin is wounded. If I should fall there is no one to take the command.”

He was instantly obeyed.

"The enemy is receiving reinforcements," he said anxiously.

"How can you tell?"

"Listen!"

Through the thunder of the enemy's batteries we could gradually distinguish bugle-sounds. The Turks were making signals. Skobelev strengthened his left flank, and moved up reinforcements to Shipka, where he believed the Turks had their hordes.

"The scamps guess we have nothing but guns of small calibre. We must cheat them. Put the men to the guns."

Our second fighting line marched into position, flags flying, the bands playing, and the men singing. At 11 o'clock the Turks concentrated their fire on our left flank. Skobelev despatched the rifle-battalion of the Ouglitzky Regiment to support it. Our men began to fall. To judge by the bullets that flew to meet them, it was clear the enemy had collected a force of at least fifteen hordes here. And how many men had they not in their rear—in the redoubts and forts defending the Shipka position to the south! Skobelev's face grew more and more grave. He looked more serious than I had ever seen him. "If I should fall, let Count Keller take over the command; I have explained everything to him."

On our left flank the firing kept increasing in intensity. They had crossed the line of fire, and it was a regular hell there. From thence Sheynovo appeared to be adjacent to the Balkans. In front of this point there were a few little hillocks which the Turks had occupied. These had to be taken at all cost. From

thence the enemy kept pouring a concentrated fire into us. Our men evidently proposed turning the flank of this position. Musketry-fire did not cease for an instant; on the contrary, it kept continually increasing and increasing in intensity. Mingled with this incessant rattling could be heard the distant tones of our regimental bands, as our fellows marched forward in fighting line. Our "Peabodies" were marching to the front, but had as yet refrained from firing. They were under fire, but did not fire themselves. For an instant the sharp-shooters of the Ouglitzky Regiment halted before one of the hillocks. The word of command was given, the men deployed in a chain, and advanced running. They surrounded the hillock in a semicircle. The enemy redoubled their volleys. At last our men reached the hillocks. A bayonet charge, a loud cheer, and our men could be seen waving their muskets on the top of the hillocks, and calling on the stragglers to come up. The Turks ran in files to the adjoining wood, and occupied the borders of it. They were retreating! The accurate fire from our sharp-shooters told so well, that a broad black border could be descried on the snow leading from the hillocks along the way down which they had fled towards the wood.

"Well done, Ouglitzky Regiment!" cried Skobelev. "I have been blamed for the Zeleny Gory. You remember what men I had to replace the losses I sustained at Plevna. What cowards they were! It was impossible to make them fight. And now, look at them! How splendidly they stand. These are your Zeleny Gory. In a fortnight my division received its military education."

The hillocks became black with the numbers of men now occupying them. Our sharp-shooters covered them from top to bottom, resting, but only for a moment, from their exertions. The advantage had to be followed up, and the attack continued. Then—the chain had again unfolded itself, and our men were again advancing. They marched along rapidly and well. The enemy's fire grew still more desperate. Suddenly reinforcements joined them. Their volleys became more frequent, and finally the Turks rushed out of the wood, and faced our men with a deadly fire. Against their left flank our men saw the Circassians advancing; their own right had halted, and was wavering. They retreated. Another minute and the chain of rifles retreated behind one of the hillocks, firing as they went. One minute more, and Skobelev trembled for the hillocks. But no, the hillocks remained ours.

The enemy's cavalry did not think of retreating. It had galloped up to our flank, and was now manœuvring between us and Shipka. Individual Circassians rode within sound of us, and commenced swearing in Russian, and then galloped off again at full speed. Our Cossacks were on the point of riding after them, and returning the compliment. But Skobelev called out:

“I don't admire those tricks in the saddle. Tell them to obey orders, and not to tumble. I don't like acrobats. Send two *sotnyas* (squadrons) of Donskoy Cossacks to attack the enemy!”

Lowering their lances, and unfurling themselves into line, the Cossacks charged the enemy. They swept past us like a hurricane. The Turks waited till they

came up to within two hundred paces, when they gave a volley at random, and ran towards Shipka.

“Count Tolstoy is wounded,” said an orderly, riding up to Skobelev.

“Ough ! To lose Tolstoy just at this juncture, when he is so much wanted ! What a pity, what a pity ! Let Panyutin take command.”

The reserves were drawing nearer and nearer to the fighting line.

“How well they march !” Skobelev exclaimed.

Each regiment marched up, its band playing, and lay down in the ditches “until called for.” The fog was clearing up, the spurs of the neighbouring mountains were growing visible, and we could just see how the Turkish hordes, like the shadows of the clouds above, were gliding downwards.

The entire Ouglitzky Regiment was now in the first fighting line. The decisive moment was drawing near. As we looked at the battle, we could not help admiring the regular movements and smart appearance of the Ouglitzky Regiment, which deployed as though on a parade-ground, and marched up to the fighting-line with band playing and flags flying. The battle had now become general along our whole line. On our left-flank the rifles, who had retreated towards the hillocks, now raised a loud cheer, which was caught up by the whole line, and carried from company to company, till it was re-echoed again by the reserves, and the battle rang with that clear hurrah ! Again the brave rifles on the left flank charged the enemy, and broke through their first line of defence ; they jumped on the earthworks,

which had been temporarily raised in the wood, and soon we could see red tongues of fire leaping out at the enemy; we could hear the cries of the vanquished, and the triumphant shouts of our victorious rifles. And now came that period of the battle when the force of fate replaces the directing will of a single leader, when the director of the battle can only reinforce, direct, but can no longer stop an action, nor interfere with it. Our men were evidently dying to be at the enemy, but Skobelev still wished to delay the charge, knowing as he did that he had but few reserves to back him.

"The Souzdal Regiment and two Bulgarian legions have arrived on the field," an orderly reported.

"The Turks are threatened by our cavalry in the rear," another galloped up to say.

"We have touched with Mirsky—here is a letter from the Prince."

"Well, now, in God's name!" said Skobelev, as he devoutly crossed himself.

It was like an earthquake! The drums beat like a rumbling volcano for the final charge. The men, boiling with military ardour, were restrained for an instant.

"Now, victory is certain," Skobelev said, looking at his men, and let them loose.

I will not speak here of the colossal battle which unfolded itself under Radetzky, in the mountain mists, and which raged against our flank column under Prince Mirsky. This work deals only with Skobelev, for which reason I confine myself to the part he played at the battle of Sheynovo.

The Ouglitzky and Kazan Regiments and the 5th Bulgarian Legion pushed forward in splendid order, in the face of a severe fire from the enemy. Our men did not fire a shot. On that day they scarcely expended a single cartridge, and used the bayonet the whole time. They marched to the borders of the wood with their muskets shouldered, to the tune of a ceremonial march. Men do not march so well even on parade. When they reached the wood they deployed into battalions, and in the face of a close and persistent fire they charged at a round running pace. To obviate a useless loss of life as much as possible, the men lay down in ditches, and at the word of command jumped up again, ran on, and then lay down in ditches again. The Bulgarians behaved especially well. One battalion, on which a particularly strong fire had been concentrated, refused to advance. Twice they were ordered "Forward!" but they remained as still as posts. Then their commanding officer snatched the regimental colours from the ensign's hand, and threw himself on the enemy. In an instant the whole battalion was after him like one man. Their attack was so irresistible that the first line of the enemy's lodgments and trenches was immediately in our hands. In obedience to Skobelev's orders the Turkish advanced position had been attacked simultaneously by the Kazan Regiment on the left, and the Ouglitzky Regiment on the right.

And now commenced a hand-to-hand bayonet fight. Quarter was neither asked nor given. They thrust at each other without mercy, their teeth clenched. Our men tried to avoid looking into the faces of their oppo-

nents. This is a characteristic peculiarity. The soldier never looks into the face of the man he runs through, else the dead man's glance would haunt him for life. This is a superstition common to all.

The enemy's riflemen, who had stood at these trenches all the time, did not retreat. They remained at their post. As they had stood so did they fall, defending the earthworks. They lay in thick heaps, like a second line of earthworks. The wounded seized their enemies as they fell and tried to smother them, or in their utter weakness and helplessness buried their teeth in their enemies' flesh until a heavy blow from the butt-end of a musket cracked open their skull, and extinguished their last remaining spark of life. The Bulgarian militiamen fought with as much determination as our regulars, aye, with even a greater fierceness, for the spirit of tribal hatred was roused in them.

When the first lines had been taken, our task was yet far from completed. Our men saw before them the Turkish fortified camp with its redoubts. The fortified camp was really a village, of which every hedge was the breast-work of a trench, and every hut a block-house. Here the battle raged, cut up into small skirmishes. Musket-shots poured in in every direction. One might easily lose his head here. The Turks defended their position desperately, but our fellows drove them out at the point of the bayonet.

"The borders of forests and villages frequently change and rechange hands in battles," said Skobelev. "I am much afraid lest the Turks should bring up any fresh troops, and, throwing all their forces on the village,

might turn us out again. With fresh troops they could do a good deal against our fatigued men."

To prevent such an eventuality, Skobeleff ordered another battalion from the reserves. The men rushed to the front, and were instantly enveloped in smoke.

"Should our men waver, those trenches may serve as a resting-place for them to come to their senses in again, and recommence the attack."

But such a refuge soon proved unnecessary.

The enthusiasm of our men grew. They carried all before them. Behind the fortified camp they found redoubts, and these they took also. No one knows who were the first to mount the redoubt. The regiments passed through the redoubt without even appearing to halt in it; and, nevertheless, as they marched on, they left behind them loads of killed and wounded. It was found that the defenders of the redoubt had been charged with the bayonet. On the left there was another and more formidable redoubt. It could not be taken by an attack in its front. A battalion of the Kazan Regiment turned its flank and attacked it in the rear; throwing itself so suddenly on the Turks, who did not expect an attack from that quarter, that these threw down their arms in despair, and, lifting their hands to heaven, could only articulate "Anan! Aman!"

Two more redoubts were taken at the point of the bayonet. In the next redoubt the Turks noticed that the Kazan fellows were trying to turn their flank, so they made a sortie and fell on the Ouglitzky Regiment. But the Kazan Battalion deployed in line, and opened such a well-directed fire, that scarcely a man survived.

That was the only instance in which our men fired. The battle of the 28th of December was won solely by the bayonet; and for this reason we had such small losses. I wish particularly to point this out in proof of the ideal discipline into which Skobelev had got his men. The soldier who attacks his enemy without firing a shot is a pattern of discipline and self-control. It is difficult to believe how great a delusion it is to fire on the enemy, and how much wiser it is to wait for the bayonet; the fire of an attacking force can do but little injury to an entrenched enemy.

By a quarter to two the village, with all its fortifications, was taken.

It was a master-stroke of Skobelev's to despatch troops to create a diversion on the right flank. He had at first massed all his men on his left flank, and obstinately repeated his attacks on that side. But as soon as he saw that the Turks had concentrated their forces against his left flank, he suddenly changed his front, and passed on to an attack from the right. By these means the Turks had not only been deceived, but they had weakened and laid bare the key of their position. Without that brilliant manœuvre the game would have perhaps been lost, and the Turkish army would not have received that final and decisive check-mate. After his brilliant attack Skobelev drew up the Vladimir Regiment in front of Sheynovo, and prepare to lead them himself against the enemy's centre.

"Now, follow me, brothers! Your comrades have done their duty honourably, let us finish well too!"

"We will try, your Excellency!"

“Mind you do! March well. The Turks are nearly routed. God bless us!”

The men took off their caps, crossed themselves, the band played a march, and the attack commenced. The men were enthusiastic. They marched bravely, splendidly; there was not a single straggler. We had not had time to reach the wood when one of Skobeleff's orderlies came galloping up at full speed, waving his hand to us in the distance. When he reached us he was so out of breath and so fatigued he could scarcely speak.

“Your Excellency!—the Turks—have hung out—the white flag!”

“How? Where? Surely not so soon as that! Well, gentlemen, follow me quickly.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I SHALL never forget that maddening, jubilant sensation of victory. We galloped along at full career, we breathed deep and long, and yet there seemed to be too little air and space for us. Skobelev kept spurring his horse. The noble animal flew like an arrow, but the General was impatient at its slowness. Branches brushed against his face, brooks and ditches were cleared unconsciously. At one spot the water splashed all over us, but no one even winked. On, on! The ranks of the Vladimir Regiment resounded with loud and joyous cheers as they ran after Skobelev. We did not notice the dead bodies that lay scattered in our path.

Later, as we analysed the sensations of that ride, we darkly remembered seeing faces rising almost from underneath our horses' hoofs, with breasts streaming with blood, and wounded heads, stretching out their hands towards us, imploring us to take compassion on them. We remembered others who had firmly gripped hold of each other, and thus become petrified in their hour of death. And far off behind the mountains the

battle was still raging. There the butchery was still going on, men were falling, dying, writhing in torments, fighting.

"Does the entire army capitulate?" Skobelev enquired.

"Ten hordes have fled," the orderly replied.

"Ride off at once to Dokhtouroff. Send the cavalry in pursuit. Let not a single man escape me. You hear?"

And digging his spurs still more fiercely into his horse's sides, the General careered on still more madly than before.

"I have the honour to congratulate your Excellency," shouted a lieutenant, as he rode up.

"What with?"

"No. 1 Cossack Regiment, under Dokhtouroff, has turned the flank of the flying Turks, attacked them in the rear, killed several hundred men, and taken prisoners——"

"How many?" Skobelev interrupted him, impatiently.

"Six thousand men."

"Thank you. A fortunate day!"

A procession was now coming to meet us. They were doctors and army-hospital men with the sign of the red crescent. High above their heads they held sheets of paper—Geneva certificates—and men crowded round them.

"Let them carry their own and strange wounded. Promise them perfect safety. Soldiers, those are not prisoners. Those are free people—they are doctors.

They will help our own fellows as well as the enemy's. They are our friends; mind you do not insult them!"

And we recommenced our mad career. Heaps of dead bodies—numbers of wounded—the border of the forest again—a wide plain. Here we called a halt.

It was a beautiful plain which opened out before us in front of the forest which we had now left behind. There, on our left, were the ruins of Shipka, under frowning masses of the steep heights of the Balkans. There, lower down, was a whole line of redoubts. From behind the earthworks we could see the forms of soldiers and bristling bayonets. But those soldiers belonged to us, those bayonets were ours. At others we could see the red-headed Turks, but they were silent, and they piled their muskets before them. Volleys sounded from the heights of the Shipka pass above.

"Why, where is the white flag?" Skobelev asked, impatiently.

"More to the right."

There, over the river, troops stood drawn up in regular columns. It was foggy still over there. We could not distinguish in the yellow mist whether the men were ours or the enemy's.

"Whoever they may be, here goes"; and Skobelev put spurs to his horse and determinedly rode on.

The horses' hoofs splashed through the river and covered us with water. A cheer greeted us from the other side. They were our fellows.

"Where is the white flag?"

"Behind us, your Excellency."

And we galloped on at the same mad pace. There was a redoubt, just visible amidst heaps of killed and wounded. There rose a hillock exactly like a sugar-loaf. A spiral trench wound round it from top to bottom. The ground was not visible for the red fezes with which it was strewn. It was bright and gorgeous. From the summit Krupp guns stood frowning down in all directions, and high above them waved two white flags.

"The scamps!" Skobelev exclaimed.

"Who are scamps?"

"Who but scamps would give up a position like that?"

"But it was no longer tenable. It was surrounded."

"Surrounded! But they could fight? It was their duty to die!"

A figure emerged from the fog and drew near to Skobelev. It was an officer bringing the sword of the captive Pasha.

"Who is the commanding officer?"

"Weyssil Pasha."

"And Ayoob?"

"Ayoob has gone long since."

"Has he surrendered?"

"Unconditionally, relying on the mercy of his victors."

"On the mercy?"

"Quite so."

"Return the prisoner's sword—the Turks' property must be sacred to us. Let not a crumb of theirs be lost. Warn the men I shall shoot them for stealing."

A cavalcade was now approaching, but they were

not ours. Very different from us, indeed. Their kepis were different, and the uniforms not the same to which our eyes had been accustomed. Weyssil rode in front. A fleshy face with bushy and overhanging brows, gloomy and unattractive.

Skobelev stretched out his hand to him, and said a few words of welcome.

The Turks were sombre. It was hard for them to bear—insufferably hard.

“To-day Turkey perishes. It is Allah’s will. We did all we could.”

“You fought splendidly, bravely. Interpret to them that such enemies do us honour. They are brave soldiers.”

“And yet,” Skobelev muttered *sotto voce*, whilst his words were being conveyed to them, “and yet they were scamps to give up such a position.”

Triumphant shouts were heard on all sides, wild hurrahs kept ringing through the air in every direction. The faces of our men were excited and radiant.

“Thank you, my friends! thank you, comrades! thank you, my eagles!” Skobelev shouted to them.

“How many men and guns had they?” Skobelev asked the interpreter.

“Thirty-five thousand men and one hundred and thirteen guns.”

“And they surrendered! What generals!”

Descending from the redoubt, the Turks surrounded us like a wall. We could hear them calling “Akh-Pasha! Akh-Pasha!” they were all impatiently straining their eyes on Skobelev.

"What do they say?" Skobelev asked.

"They say no wonder they were defeated, for the Russians were commanded by Akh-Pasha, and it is impossible to fight against him."

The battle was still raging on the heights. Skobelev listened and listened, and his anger grew.

"Tell the Pasha," he said, "that if he does not order those men to lay down their arms, I shall storm them, and give no quarter."

"They will surrender at once," the Pasha replied.

We could hear music in the distance, and saw the Vladimir Regiment marching along in splendid style, with its flags floating in the wind.

"I will myself convey the order. Tell the Turks that I will accompany them."

And Skobelev galloped off, surrounded by armed Turks. Two or three Russians followed him.

"Our position is a queer one," one of these said.

"Anything else?"

"Well, how would you act in the place of the enemy?"

Skobelev burst out laughing.

"Firstly, I should never be in their place."

"But supposing you were."

"Of course, I should draw swords at once."

Later, at Geok Teppé, he went further. After the storming and capture of that fortress, Skobelev was riding towards Askhabat, which had not yet surrendered. He was met by 700 Turcomans, armed to the teeth, and in their most brilliant costumes, the flower of the Tekké army. Skobelev immediately began

reproaching and abusing them; they signified their submission. Skobeleff rode at them, saying:

“And if you should dare to rebel against us, I shall have examples made of you.”

“The Tekkés never lie.”

“If that is the case, gentlemen, please to ride back with me—be my body-guard.”

And an unprecedented incident took place. The General alone, surrounded by 700 desperate enemies mounted, rode into Askhabat. They accompanied him twenty miles!

Naturally, neither his former victories, nor the dread of his name, could make him so popular with them as this ride.

From that moment he was regarded as one of themselves by the entire Tekké tribe.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHAT a difference from Plevna ! There the prisoners remained a long time without food. They had to camp in the open air in the mud and snow of a Bulgarian winter. But here everything was done to soften their hard lot. They messed together with our own men, and Skobeleff had ordered that double rations should be provided in the camp-kettles. Three hours after their surrender, the Turks already had their food. At night they slept in the huts and redoubts, and the next morning they were despatched to Gabrovo under the convoy of Bulgarian militia.

“We suffered hardships afterwards, but with Akh-Pasha we had none,” they said.

The men, fatigued though they were with the excitement of the day, prepared porridge for the Turks before they lay down to rest. The Turkish officers were entertained by our officers, and shown the utmost hospitality. The pashas found accommodation among our generals. At Shipka not a single prisoner died, whilst at Plevna they fell in hundreds.

"If but a tenth part of this care and attention awaits us in Russia, our families need feel no anxiety for us," they said.

"Mind, my men," said Skobelev, "the Turks are your friends now. Nothing can be more dishonourable and mean than to beat a man when he is down. Is not that so? As long as they had guns in their hands, they had to be exterminated. Once they are disarmed, let no one dare to harm them even with his finger. A warrior should be ashamed to insult a prisoner."

And, indeed, the relations of Skobelev's men to their prisoners were kind and hearty.

On the day after the battle along the Balkans in the plain of Kazanlik, the famous troops of our famous leader stood drawn up in two lines. Bright, cheerful, and beaming, Skobelev passed along the ranks, cap in hand.

"In the name of our country, I thank you, my men!"

"Hurrah!" they shouted in reply. Their caps flew into the air, and the faces of these new legionaries of the Russian Cæsar were so full of love and devotion that Skobelev's eyes were filled with tears for some time afterwards. This moment was seized by our talented painter, Verestchaguin for his picture.

I met Skobelev again later on at Kazanlik. He was gloomy. Intrigues were again on foot against him; but these are the heritage of history. At present I shall be silent upon this subject. Let the uneasy consciences of those who were his enemies while living, and are his friends now he is dead, speak in them. A more pitiless Nemesis there is not and cannot be.

"To-morrow I go to Adrianople."

"Have your men already rested, then?"

"I rode round my men to-day, and asked them whether they would rest—whether they wished to give the enemy time to recover his losses. They answered in the negative; and so I shall lead them. They have their *point d'honneur*."

"And what may that be?"

"They wish to arrive before the Guards. Where to arrive at they did not know, because they had never known of the existence of Adrianople till just this minute. They think I am going to take Constantinople."

"Are we not going there, then?"

Skobelev flared up.

"What other course is possible? We cannot do otherwise. We must give Russia that satisfaction; we can only stop at the Bosphorus."

And we did stop at the Bosphorus, only it was at some distance from Stamboul!

At Kazanlik Skobelev did not give himself a minute's rest; indeed, when resting he was good for nothing, fitful, impatient, and dissatisfied with everything. His was an active, war-like nature, which was more fatigued by quiet than by the most exciting, feverish, and incessant work. When there was nothing to do, he invented work. A favourite phrase of his at this time was, "Russia cannot wait, she has no time to rest; rest is in the grave!" And, indeed, he never found rest till he was covered with the pall and lay at the Hotel Duseaux. He was afraid of rest.

“Nothing demoralises a man more than quiet; nothing weakens him so much as rest.”

Battle was a necessity of life to him. Everyone remembers what he used to do in his rare moments of relaxation. When others would hang down their heads, and fall from fatigue, he would jump into his saddle and gallop off some hundred miles or so. This he called relaxation. On returning, he would have a shower-bath, sleep a few hours, and he would be fresh and bright again, ready for any difficult undertaking. Or else he would go off somewhere to the officers of his division, and spend days and days in their society and that of his men. At that period he loved no society better. The head-quarters clique bored him. There he was not in his element. He either disputed with them violently, and unceremoniously picked their feathers, or else held his peace in gloomy silence. With his father alone he spoke frankly there. Either the son chaffed his parent, or the latter twitted his son.

“Well, have they docked you of your plumes yet?” the father would ask as young Skobeleff returned from Nepokoytchitzky.

“No.”

“Sorry to hear it.”

“Why?”

“Because you have spread them out too much.”

“Look here, you won’t give me any money, and laugh at me into the bargain.”

“And I shan’t give you any.”

“Wait till they put you under my command.”

“What will you do then?”

"I shall put you under arrest for insubordination," and they both burst out laughing.

When Skobelev was contused on the night of the 8th November, his father came to see him. Skobelev lay in bed quite ill.

"Well, have you got caught at last? Serve you right. Why do you go meddling and fussing about?" the old man commenced scolding.

"All your fur coat."

"My fur coat?"

"Yes, of course. It was all through that."

Skobelev was very superstitious. His father had made him a present of a fur coat, in which he was immediately contused. Two days later he was contused again.

"Do take back your fur coat. I had much rather have the money."

At Kazanlik Skobelev's father commanded a separate force.

"Why did you not come to me and report yourself in full uniform?" his son sternly asked.

"Because I was not placed under your command."

"Then you ought to have been."

One night, at Kazanlik, I was riding home. It was pitch dark; you could not see your hand. Suddenly I came upon a horseman. The lane was narrow.

"Hey, who goes there? Keep to the left!"

"Oh, is that you?" Skobelev's voice shouted, calling me by name.

"Where are you going to?"

"Oh, I am just galloping off to a little village. I

shall get there by day-break. I want to see how my men are fed. By the time their breakfast is getting ready, I shall be there. I shall arrive unexpectedly. Come with me." And off we went.

And his care for his men grew greater and greater as time advanced. He felt for them, his heart bled for them. Every insult and injustice to the private he felt acutely ; it was as if the insult had been aimed at him personally. He would grow pale with rage when he was told how in one division the men were starved, in another they were flogged, and how in a third their lives were sacrificed in useless reconnaissances in force.

CHAPTER XXX.

SKOBELEFF'S march from Kazanlik to Adrianople is a feat worthy of a permanent place in the annals of military history. Infantry had never yet achieved such rapid marches, marches which some cavalry might have been unable to accomplish. The General's extraordinary energy and force of will alone could scarcely have arrived at such grand results had not the forces under his command been in the most perfect discipline. There was no possibility of resting on the way. On the 28th December the army under Weyssil Pasha was taken prisoner, after a most fatiguing march from Plevna to Gabrovo, the exhausting passage of the Balkans, which occupied three days, and an obstinate battle in the plain of Kazanlik. On the 1st of January the van-guard of Skobelev's army had left the town, and was on its way to the lesser Balkans. All this movement, from the day of the fall of Plevna, turns one's head. We seemed to be anxious to indemnify ourselves for our long forced inaction before Plevna. The head-quarters of the Grand Duke Commanding-in-Chief were almost in the van of

the army ; and our men, from the north and west, were pouring down to arrive as rapidly as possible before the gates of Constantinople.

“ A campaign like this I can understand. This suits me,” said Skobelev. “ A few more days of this sort of thing, and no one will be able to stop us. We shall roll on to the Bosphorus.”

All the way we were continually taking Turkish positions, bridges, railway-stations, and towns just evacuated by the fleeing Turks. The cavalry divisions, sent out to patrol the country and keep touch with the enemy, pushed on as far as they could ; but at the close of each day they saw dark masses of infantry overtaking them. Refreshed by their recent victories, Skobelev's men performed wonders. Skobelev, whom it was generally difficult to astonish, spoke of them with admiration.

“ What could one not do with such men ? Fancy, the Tirnova bridge of the Adrianople Railway was attacked by one squadron of cavalry, and they routed four hundred Turkish infantry. Indeed, it is a mistake to suppose that cavalry is powerless against infantry. I had my own views on that subject. I have studied the action of cavalry during this war. In time of peace I mean to devote myself to this branch at the manœuvres, and in the next great European war I will show you what cavalry can do against infantry, when it is well-equipped and knows how to take advantage of the ground. They tell us we have no cavalry. If you like, we have not. How can we have good cavalry if its sole aim and object is considered to be to keep the horses in

a plump condition? Parade kills work. But I know some regiments which act on a very different plan already. Dokhtouroff knows what to do."

And, indeed, our cavalry showed what stuff it was made of. It attacked the burning bridge in question, turned the flank of the routed Turks, cut off their baggage, and seized whole trains of waggons and locomotives. As soon as the Turkish infantry turned on our cavalry and attacked, Skobelev's infantry always came on the field and drove them back. Frequently our cavalry would ride into towns still in possession of the enemy's infantry, and would maintain their position against the enemy, knowing full well that in the course of an hour or two they would be joined by their own infantry—and they would gain the day. The forced marches of that campaign were something remarkable. Sometimes, after the men had marched some twenty or thirty miles, and they had only just halted to rest, they were suddenly pushed on again. And under what circumstances were these marches performed? Buried in mud, with a cold rain falling, and their coats wet through! On the way they were continually coming across pits and ditches full of fluid mud. Horses refused to go further, but the men kept bravely marching on, even helping the horses in their difficult work. Besides doing about fifty miles a day, they dragged their guns with them as well. One regiment, for instance, had got as far as Khaskio, and had just prepared to lie down to rest, when they were suddenly ordered back to Germanli. Returning to Germanli they there passed a part of the night. They required rest to regain their

waning strength, when Skobelev suddenly rode up and said :

“ I congratulate you very much, you are to march to Adrianople.”

No other general would have succeeded in making his men do anything of the kind. With him, though they might be gloomy and morose, they nevertheless went. When the march became especially difficult, Skobelev dismounted and mixed with the men. On one occasion, after a march of some fifty odd miles, the strength of the men completely forsook them, when intelligence was received of the movements of Prince Hassan and his Egyptian contingent, so Skobelev spoke to the men as follows :

“ My little doves—try once more. Do not let us disgrace ourselves almost within sight of Adrianople.”

The men rose and marched on. Their legs staggered under the weight of their bodies.

“ Comrades, another march, and I shall feed you with porridge in the evening,” Skobelev shouted, cheerfully.

And the men laughed, and marched on so well that they not only came up with Hassan, but cut off his tail ; *i.e.* seized his train and provisions, and one hundred camels. These camels were kept in Skobelev’s division.

“ These are our camels, kind animals, quite soldier’s cattle,” the men said of them.

One subject caused Skobelev the greatest anxiety, and that was to keep his men properly fed. Wherever they were, on the march, in battle, in uninhabited deserts, or a freshly-captured town, his men had always their hot meals, and could eat their fill.

“One can do everything with them, only he must know how.”

“How was it that others did not succeed in making such marches?”

“You see, my little soul” (a favourite word of Skobelev’s), “a general must have great authority over his men to make them love him. When that point is gained, then we can do anything. But neither the one nor the other can be easily obtained. Nor can it be got for nothing. Once that is all right, and if, besides, one has energy beating in his veins like a running brook, there need be no fear. Wonders can be performed. You understand me—wonders. Is it not a miracle to overtake cavalry with infantry, for instance? Wherever the cavalry went my infantry managed to find and overtake them. For me this is practice.”

“Practice for what?”

“Practice, so that, in case of a great European war, I shall be able unexpectedly to concentrate large masses of men on the most unlikely points. If we should ever have to fight the Germans, I shall always try to confront one of their divisions with two of mine. But to do this, men must be taught to bear fatigue. Neither distance nor weather should keep them back. In this we shall have the pledge of success.”

When Skobelev rested and slept during this extraordinary march is a mystery. His division was so weak in numbers that they had to entrench themselves whenever they rested for the night.

“Why did you hurry so, three days more or less

could not have made such a great difference?" he was asked afterwards.

"Why, on the other side of Maritza, parallel with us, marched the hordes of Abdoul Kerim Pasha. Adrianople was, therefore, a sort of prize which would be awarded to the quickest. If they had appeared before us, they would have got into the fortresses of Adrianople, and then good-bye to the chances of bringing the war to a speedy termination."

Our movements were so rapid that Server and Namuik Pashas, who expected to come up with us at Kazanlik, stood aghast when they were met by masses of flying Turks on the roads.

"Where are the Muscovites?" they asked.

"The Muscovites are near!"

At last, at about fifty miles beyond Adrianople, they were surprised to come against the van-guard of Skobelev's army.

"Whose army do you belong to?"

"Akh-Pasha's!"

Namuik was so shaken by this sudden intelligence that he fell back into his carriage and burst into tears. An hour later, a guard of honour from Skobelev rode up to them. Skobelev received them himself.

"Would not the Pashas like to rest and pass the night here?" he inquired.

"No, no, not on any account."

"And why not?"

"If we remain here to-night, you will be at Adrianople. And by the time we reach head-quarters you will have got to Stamboul!"

And, indeed, the Pashas had scarcely had time to reach head-quarters, had scarcely heard all the conditions of the treaty, the first article of which was the surrender of Adrianople, they had scarcely laid themselves down to rest, in fact, when they were awakened by Colonel Orloff.

“The Grand Duke Commanding-in-Chief has ordered me to inform you that the surrender of Adrianople need no longer be included in the provisional treaty.”

“What does that imply?”

“This morning Skobelev has taken Adrianople.”

“That cannot be, Souleyman must be at Edirne by this time.”

“Souleyman is routed, and has flown to the mountains.”

Skobelev made a triumphal entry into Adrianople. Crowds of people flowed out to meet him. Flowers and wreaths were strewn along his path. Bulgarian women, orphaned by the execution or fall of their fathers, husbands, and brothers, found their way to his side, and kissed his hands and feet—a thousand blessings were heard on every side. Before entering the town, the General made a little speech to his soldiers:

“I hope, brothers,” he said, “that you will not disgrace yourselves here by violent actions. We are received as friends, and must behave as such. Dare to touch anything or anybody! If there should prove to be men amongst you capable of theft and robbery, which I do not believe, which I do not wish to believe, I shall shoot them without ceremony. But I know

there will be no occasion for it, my men are not capable of anything of that sort ! ”

A cheer greeted his speech.

“ You will at first be billeted in private houses, which, until the population gets used to you, you must not leave.”

And on the first day of our occupation not a single soldier was seen in the streets of Adrianople. Shutters were removed from the shops, concealed goods were again placed in the windows, trade flourished as before. The inhabitants thanked our troops for their astonishing orderliness and sent them large quantities of all kinds of provisions. Two days later, when our soldiers ventured to show themselves in the streets, they were received and treated everywhere as friends. Some of the shopkeepers refused to take money from them ; but our men pressed them :

“ Take it ; take it. We are your own people. Don’t say, little brother, after we are gone, that any of us have dealt unfairly by you. We should be severely punished.”

During a fortnight not the least disorder was experienced. There was not a single instance of theft or burglary ; not even a street row. No one ever lodged a complaint against any soldier. “ The Turks did not treat us so well. Never were trade and commerce so well patronized in Edirné ! ” the inhabitants said. Skobelev left, the town was occupied by other divisions, and the recent quiet and calm was superseded by ——

But this does not enter into the programme of my book.

“Thank you, my men,” said Skobeleff to his regiments as he left Adrianople. “I thank you from my heart. You have held high the honour of the Russian soldier. You have shown the peaceful inhabitants that you are not their enemies but their friends ; you will defend all who do not march against you with weapons in their hands. Defenders of the defenceless, I thank you—terrible in battle, and generous in relaxation ! ”

“Well, half our task is done ! ” he said at Adrianople. “My men are fully entitled to be proud of their march from Kazanlik. And do you know for what reason mainly ? ”

“For their rapidity and earnestness ? ”

“That is not all. Notwithstanding our celerity and earnestness, we lost no men. We had no stragglers. Now tell me, did you ever come across any of my men or of Stroukoff’s men in the rear ? ”

“No.”

“That is the point. Such a campaign—and no stragglers ! We arrived at Adrianople, and we found we had no sick. That is why I and my men may be justly proud of this episode. And now, God grant we may get quickly into Constantinople.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

ADRIANOPLE, in Turkish "Edirné," seems to me still a distant, poetical dream ; it is a beautiful town, crowned, as it were, with the mosque of Selim with its four wonderful minarets. It is the Mussulman Moscow, the second capital of the Sultans ; its very name conjures up to the Ottoman nation recollections of their former splendour and glory. I entered with fluttering sensations. Skobelev took up his quarters in the house of Ahmed-Younous-Bey, which had been deserted by its occupants. The master, a celebrated leader of Bashi-Bazooks, a renegade, who had been a Christian, but was now a fanatical Turk, hating and persecuting the people to whose religion he had formerly belonged, the scourge of peaceful citizens, naturally had no reason to count on the friendship of Russians. But his house was the *beau idéal* of an oriental dwelling. This Mussulman palace displayed a luxuriousness of which I had had previously no conception. The tropical plants of its winter gardens, its marble halls, poetical fountains, the cells of the harem suggestive of calm repose and self-

indulgence, the mirrored walls and magnificent stairs, all these were worthy the house of a Turkish magnate. The frescoed and stuccoed ceilings were reflected in the clear water of the interior fountains, and tropical flowers, sprinkled with the diamond spray of many fountains, sent a delicious perfume through the splendid saloons. Skobelev chose the simplest room for himself; the others were occupied by his staff. There was but little time for relaxation at Adrianople. From the very first days, rides into the environs and reconnaissances at Tchorla and Hadem Kio were undertaken. Besides, there was a fearful amount of red-tape to be gone through with the consuls and the authorities of the Turkish town. Here Skobelev first showed his wonderful administrative capacity, by which he completely surprised head-quarters. The period of his government of Adrianople was remarkable in every sense of the word. Everyone regretted him, from the bankers and capitalists of Edirné down to the last fugitive Turk.

"It was much better under Akh-Pasha," they used to say. "Akh-Pasha never allowed us to be insulted."

Others said: "Skobelev is just. He knows no distinction between friends and strangers. In his time there were no misunderstandings."

Here Skobelev parted with a remarkable orderly, a Turk. At the battle of Sheynovo he saved the life of a young Turkish officer.

"What am I to do with myself?" the officer asked.

"Ride about with me."

And so he remained attached to Skobelev's person.

The others used to laugh to see the importance with which this young Turk followed Skobelev about, hardly ever quitting his side. He at last became seriously attached to the General—followed him as a dog follows his master. At Kazanlik he was always with the General. At last he carried despatches and messages to the Turks, and collected all sorts of information for us. He became a regular aide-de-camp.

He was questioned as to the position of the Turks during the battle of Sheynovo, and answered satisfactorily. Himself showed us the best way of getting at the enemy, and the most convenient mode of attack.

“There is patriotism for you!” Skobelev would say savagely. “And yet he was a brave officer. However splendid soldiers they might be, how could the Turkish army do great things with such officers? Let him be, don’t question him; an officer should not be a spy. Nevertheless, we may as well!” And Skobelev, laughing at the idea of being caught delivering himself of a piece of sentimentality, immediately took full advantage of the knowledge and information possessed by the Turk.

“They must not be judged from our point of view!”

Nevertheless this individual aroused my curiosity; and when an opportunity offered I asked him how he could bring himself to serve his enemies.

“Because it is Akh-Pasha. Everybody would think it an honour to obey Akh-Pasha. There are no generals like him. The Koran says so.”

“How can you make that out?”

“The Koran says: ‘Be subject to your conqueror.’ There is no power greater than the sword.”

At Adrianople the belief was current that Turkey would be no more, and that all her European provinces would be taken by Russia at the close of the war. When Skobeleff summoned the Ulemas (the muftis and learned men), they replied in the same spirit as his Turkish orderly.

“We must submit to the conqueror,” they said.

“But suppose I give Adrianople to the Bulgarians?” Skobeleff suggested.

“The Bulgarians did not conquer us, and, according to the Koran, we should revolt against them and exterminate them. The Russians have conquered us with the edge of the sword, and they alone have the right to be our rulers.”

“And if they should prove as just as you,” a venerable greybeard added, “we shall praise Allah for having subjected us to you. With Russians it is possible to live.”

“Thou didst touch nothing; neither our property nor our wives. When the Armenians and Greeks and Bulgarians thought to outrage us, to take advantage of our misfortunes, thou tookst the part of the Turks; thou wast our defence. Let the White Tsar make thee the ruler of this villayette—we desire nothing further.”

“The Turks themselves cannot believe that we shall ever give up Adrianople,” Skobeleff said. “Can it be possible that we shall not keep it for the Slavs! It cannot be!”

Later I met him on the ramparts of Adrianople.

Adrionople is splendidly fortified, and if Souleyman or Abdul-Kerim or Weyssil, in retreating, had occupied it, a Plevna would have risen up before us, compared to which the one we had left behind, which had detained us six months, would have paled. There are twenty-seven forts, which are posted in correct positions round the town, within musket-range of each other. Every regiment advancing to the attack would have found itself exposed to the fire of at least two of these redoubts. Their wonderful adaptation to the circumstances of the ground surprised Skobelev.

"Here is the master hand!" he exclaimed. "What wonderful engineers! Not like ours! Our Russian engineer builds beforehand, as it were, builds by book—as it is written in his book so is his place. But here the shape and disposition of the forts were determined by the ground and not by books."

Indeed one could here see every kind of fortification, square, and oval, and works extending along wavy lines. Everywhere the neatness and finish of the work was surprising. All the traverses were executed in masonry, and so calculated that from whatever direction fire might come, neither guns, nor magazines, nor men could be exposed to the slightest danger. Every embrasure commanded a road, a ditch, or a mountain. The embrasures were so constructed that the line of the fire could be regulated at will. The earthworks were all perfect.

"Better it could not be!" Skobelev exclaimed. "Look, every fort has a character of its own. Here are no regulation routine plan-drawings. The engineer

was left entirely to his own initiative. Look at Redoubt No. 8; it marches along the narrow summit of a hill; it commands the river Maritza with its banks on one side, and on the other side the ruined villages. Every sinuosity gives its fire a new direction.* How could fortifications like these be given up? Do you know, I am very sorry Souleyman did not occupy them."

"Well, that's curious."

"You don't understand me. Of course, I am glad; but my military instincts are all the other way. I am at present possessed with a desire to take these forts by force of arms. How glorious to take such redoubts by storm! These are very different from those of Plevna."

And carried away by his imagination, he commenced to dispose his troops mentally, to show the points from which he would direct the attack, the approaches by which he would have led it, the ditches which would have enabled him to ambuscade his reserves and perform his manœuvres.

"They imagine that this redoubt cannot be bombarded; but I would have posted a battery over there. By constructing a sap I could have come up unperceived from here. I would have dug and dug until I was face to face with them; and then, on some favourable night—hurrah, and a bayonet charge!"

And plan after plan came pouring out of his busy brain. There was not an inequality, not the smallest

* I remember Skobelev's words well, for I entered them at the time in my "Correspondent's diary."

rising-ground that escaped his eagle eye. The impossible became performable, and the unapproachable capable of attainment.

“Believe me, for good soldiers and experienced officers, such a thing as an impregnable fortress does not exist. Gibraltar, even, could be taken, not to speak of these forts. Of course, if you persuade yourself that such and such a thing cannot be done, your mind will lose its force. In the first place, one must have audacity besides knowledge and talents, and all the rest is easily attainable. Calculation and audacity, large bodies of troops, excellent equipment, splendid artillery. —Do you see that ravine?”

“I see it.”

“By that ravine I would turn their flank and attack them in the rear, and then I would work my sweet will on them. Again, I repeat, there are no impregnable positions. Positively, there are none. There are positions which would cost too large a sacrifice to make the game worth the candle; that is quite true. But, as a principle, every position can be carried. According to the state of military science and weapons at the time, Ismaila was completely impregnable, and yet Souvoroff managed to tickle the Turks and take their fortress.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

FROM Adrianople Skobeleff marched to Tchadaldja.

“If this is merely a halting-place I shall be resigned to it, but if we shall stop here long, and not go on to Byzantium, I shall be completely disenchanted of everything. See what a wonderful country it is. Since the days of Oleg we have been striving to get here, and are we now to stop on the threshold?”

It was a wonderful country which we passed. We were still in January, but the sky was blue and cloudless; a peaceful breeze blew gently over the still sleeping earth, gardens and forests stood leafless, but the air was occasionally laden with the faint aroma of some early flowers. Towns and villages surprised us with their artistic richness of colour; tall and slender minarets stood out well against the clear sky; the arches of the mosques curved picturesquely over the cool entrances, through which nothing but mysterious darkness was visible, only faintly relieved by the uncertain glimmer of small lamps. The flat roofs of the houses looked like the steps of some enormous stair-

case. The wind sent to meet us warm waves of some other air, not our own—a gentle, caressing air. At night the plaintive, nervous, excitable songs of the Mussalmans were wafted over to our ears, and at times the eyes of the women underneath their thick veils darted looks at us, now full of hate and detestation, sometimes sparkling with curiosity and interest. The green turbans and caftans of the mulattoes, the red jackets of the Albanians, the many-coloured cloaks of the young men, all this seemed to melt into a sort of bright and beautiful kaleidoscope. In the evenings, when the hum of the many-tongued multitude had ceased, the monotonous plashing of fountains could be heard in the distance; crystal rays rose from marble fountains to fall into marble basins. At one place Skobelev received a bouquet of rare flowers, not yet in season, and not indigenous to the country.

“ Whence do these come ? ”

“ They are thank offerings from Turkish ladies.”

“ What Turkish ladies ? ”

“ From the women of Kazanlik, Eski-Zagri, and Adrianople, because their honour has not been outraged, and the inviolability of the harems has been respected by your troops.”

“ But why such gratitude ? Russians do not make war on women.”

Skobelev, far from being indifferent to the beauties of nature, enjoyed the scenery in his own fashion.

“ What splendid ground ! what positions ! ” he exclaimed. “ Here is where Turkey should have defended her inviolability. The first line of defence is the

Danube, the second the Balkans, the third the minor Balkans, but the fourth is here. If they had made their plans accordingly, it would have been long before the war would be brought to a close."

On the road he maintained an animated conversation with those around him on all kinds of subjects, galloped at full career, and was furious at the idea that further than Tchataldja we would possibly not go.

Arriving at Tchataldja, he received orders not to push any further; but at night, accompanied by only one orderly, he secretly rode off to inspect the line of demarcation. He reconnoitred Hadem-Kio and all the neighbourhood; so that, should the negotiations break down, and the Turks manage to put another army in the field, Skobeleff would be ready to attack them, and, after studying the ground so well, would know exactly how to operate against them. Whilst everyone else was congratulating himself on the prospect of a speedy peace, and on the termination of hostilities, Skobeleff and Colonel (now General) Grodekoff were secretly making plans of the line and studying all its details.

After Adrianople, the only town worthy of admiration was Constantinople. The rest were quite unworthy of notice.

Tchataldja was about two miles distant from a railway station. The division was camped round it, and the town itself was quickly filled with officers of every description. Before a few days had elapsed the enterprising Greeks and Levantines had established numberless cafés, a little later there was an eating-

house in nearly every street, and later still a whole colony of international Bohemians of the other sex settled among us. There were Frenchwomen, Italians, Armenians, Greeks. The long fast which the men had endured in Bulgaria and the Balkans was succeeded by a very saturnalia of dissipation. Gold pieces flew in all directions, and wine ran in streams. From the general to the ensign everybody enjoyed himself. When suddenly, like a clap of thunder, the news of the armistice broke upon us.

“Is it possible that we are not going to take Constantinople?” Skobeleff exclaimed, in great agitation.

He was told of the probability of a coalition, but he stuck to his question.

“The blind man always has luck. We cannot go back. It is a question of national honour and prestige. We cannot lower our flag. We may sign the most magnanimous treaty in the world (though I confess I don’t understand magnanimity), but we must sign it at Byzantium, not otherwise. That satisfaction, at least, our army should be allowed. We ought to take Gallipoli, and then not a single English ship could get into the Bosphorus. Now or never. He is in the right who is successful. Europe will not move. She will go off in splutterings and diplomatic threats.”

“But if?”

“And if! It is more likely that she will only bite off another piece from the bear’s ear. But this is impossible! I cannot—I will not believe it. Are we, the conquerors, to let a set of diplomatic old maids and prostitutes of the stock exchange dictate our terms to

us? It cannot—it must not be! Otherwise, it would be almost a disgrace to be a Russian. It is the poor-spirited and pliant, believe me, who always lose in these matters. The compliance is too steep. If once we roll down it, we shall never stop till we get to the bottom. And we are to yield now, after such a campaign, after so many sacrifices? *Allons donc!*”

The celebration of the armistice was no triumph here! It gave him no pleasure. The quiet, rest, and safety bored him. He would have preferred fresh slaughter and more bloodshed, provided only that the affair should end honourably for Russia.

The line of demarcation and the neutral strip of land, an uninhabited waste, attracted Skobelev. The villages within the specified twelve miles were deserted; there was not a single sentinel or soldier in the forts and redoubts, not an old woman in the villages. Nothing but wild, mad curs remained in the empty houses. Nevertheless the Turks might be justly proud of the defences of their side of the strip. Even the works at Adrianople were not to be compared with them.

Skobelev was enthusiastic about them.

“If we could get this engineer to join us! He is a genius!”

Skobelev subsequently made his acquaintance at Constantinople. He was a Turk by birth, Akhmet-Pasha, a fat, blown-out fellow, who looked very inactive. He was but half-educated, and knew not a single foreign language. The Turks have distanced European military science in this one particular. During the

last two centuries they have waged none but defensive wars ; they had time to learn. Skobelev got on very well with the Turkish Todleben. The latter, indeed, even showed him the fortifications of Constantinople and the plan drawings of the projected additions.

“ How did you get him to do that ? ”

“ I made him drunk. Like most Turks, he has not quite steeled his heart against champagne.”

The chief part of this strip was sketched by Skobelev himself.

“ Do you know, the key to this position is a key with which you can open nothing. It is difficult of approach, five large forts must be taken before we can get at it. And when we have taken it, we shall find that this key does not fit the lock, for there are ever so many more such keys.”

We soon discovered that the order not to march on Constantinople had been received from St. Petersburg. It had not emanated from the head-quarters of the active army. Later it was explained by the alleged altered political circumstances.

“ I am sorry the Emperor is not here amongst his troops,” Skobelev said.

“ It would make no difference. Diplomacy would go on the same.”

“ No ; his surroundings here would have balanced the influence of diplomatists. It is all the same to them. Those diplomatists have their own science and their own mysteries ; and ours, besides that, are not embarrassed with patriotism. Their chief aim is that they may not be considered Russian barbarians but refined

Europeans. And to attain this they will stick at nothing. You do not know them; but I was brought up amongst them. For them Russia does not signify at all. There is no more egotistical set than they. It is easily explained;—a foreign education, constantly living abroad.”

“But you were also educated abroad.”

“Under Girardé, yes. But you know what sort of an education I had? Have I never told you?”

“Never.”

“My first tutor was a German; an unjust, rude, mean fellow, thoroughly mean. I hated him as much as anyone can hate another. From that time Germans have not been my bosom friends. Then once he struck me, a boy of thirteen, in the presence of a girl I admired immensely; struck me without the slightest provocation on my part. I forgot what I did. I sprang on him, seized him, and remained petrified. And do you know what this fellow taught me? He taught that Germany was everything to Russia; that everything in Russia had been done by Germans, and that Russia must either obey Germany or perish. There was no universe, there was nothing but Germany. And I hated it from my heart.”

“Had that hatred shown itself long ago?”

“Oh yes! and then my father turned the German out, who had been given me to discipline me, but who had only succeeded in hardening me. I was sent to Girardé, in Paris. What a contrast! I love Girardé till now, more than my own relations. He taught me to love my country, showed me that there was



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nothing on earth higher than the country, and said that, however it might be abused, every citizen should carry his country's name with pride. He was a *man* in every sense of the word. After having experienced a course of hard words, abuses, and blows, I now met with softness, attention, and delicacy. When I was forbidden anything, I was not told it was because my tutor ordered me not to do it, but the reasons for forbidding it were given me. I saw the world with him. I am deeply grateful to that man. He made me study, instilled into me love of knowledge and science. At St. Petersburg, or Paris, I will introduce you to him."

Alas! I was destined to make the acquaintance of this excellent tutor under very different circumstances. Over the cold, dead face of General Skobeleff I saw an old, trembling man bending down and weeping.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"Girardé."

And he survived him; he, a decrepit old man, survived that energetic youth, so full of life, so full of strength!

CHAPTER XXIII.

OUR stay before Constantinople will long be remembered by Skobeleff's army.

From day to day we expected to receive orders to occupy the empire city. The Turks had, indeed, already evacuated the barracks there; the inhabitants had prepared flowers and flags for our reception, Christians held up their heads, and a palace was being got ready for the Sultan on the Asiatic shores of the Bosphorus. At night soldiers patrolled the narrow streets of Stamboul, their hoods drawn well over their heads, for the Ottoman Government was desirous of maintaining order and preventing any rising among the people in the event of a Russian entry. Even our enemies were puzzled to see us stop at the gates of their capital and not occupy it, though only for a time. Crowds of officers and men congregated at the landing-stages on the shores of the Bosphorus, admiring the distant glow of that wonderful fairy-like town, shimmering before them amidst the peace and calm of a cloudless sky. At our feet the blue waves of the Sea of Marmora dashed and

broke with musical roars. A white light-house stood out proudly amidst a mass of raging white foam. Further off in the azure space beamed resplendent islands in all the luxuriousness of vegetation; and far, far beyond the sea of Marmora, its Asiatic shores with their snow-clad tips could be distinguished in the distance—if they had not been so immovable they might have been taken for silver clouds. And straight before us, towards the north, Byzantium unfolded herself to our gaze, with her innumerable mosques and palaces: that Byzantium which had been the dream of Russia for so many ages; of that Russia cruelly hemmed in in her wide domains, and so vainly seeking a southern outlet for her possessions and her wealth. Yes, there was Byzantium, to which, rightly or wrongly, all true Slavs had always aspired. We could distinguish the marble walls of its kiosques, and their tall and slender minarets, the magnificent cupolas of Sophia, Izeddin, Omarah, Muhradah, and Bayazid, round which ran a sort of border cut in stone. Tens of thousands of roofs and towers reared themselves on those hills, and were lost in the dark shadows of cypress forests, and green clouds of gardens. It looked like a beautiful dream, this Eastern Rome, this Rome of the Slavs, for which so many tears and so much blood had been shed that if they could all be collected they would be sufficient to drown it. At night our delighted eyes were again turned in this direction. Myriads of fires were kindled on those shores, as though some legendary leviathan were lying there, luxuriating in the caressing waves of the Bosphorus, and watching it with its many flaming eyes. We were

continually going into Constantinople. Of course, no uniforms were permitted; military men went in plain clothes, and looked so irresistibly comic that, on seeing each other, they would burst into loud roars of laughter. I was staying at the "Grand Hôtel de Luxembourg" when one day, I was still in bed, someone knocked at the door.

"Come in!"

Who should appear but Skobeleff in plain clothes!

"This is how Russian generals have to show themselves in their conquered town! But I cannot believe it. I still have hopes. I think even our diplomatists must come to their senses soon. I am expecting from day to day to receive orders to march upon Constantinople."

"They say our troops are not prepared."

"I don't know whose they call ours. I know that I have forty thousand men under arms. I could be here in three hours' time. It is a shame!"

It may seem strange, but I can testify to having seen Skobeleff in tears, speaking of Constantinople, and of how we were losing our time, and the results of the war rendered fruitless by not occupying it.

"Now it is too late to take it, after the peace."

"How, after the peace? Were we entitled to expect a peace like that? You will see that we shall give the enemies of Russia the benefits we have purchased at the cost of our own blood, and that we shall retain nothing. Why are they so squeamish? I proposed to take Constantinople myself, of my own initiative, and to give myself up to be tried by court-martial and shot,

so long as we only took and kept it. I wanted to do this even without giving notice of my intention—but who knows? perhaps they have their calculations and ideas. Perhaps it will come, anyhow.”

And, whilst the Turks were erecting new fortifications around Constantinople, Skobelev engaged his men in all sorts of manœuvres and sham attacks, and took these fortifications to prove how perfectly possible it was to capture them, without any great losses. And once he thus stormed the key of the enemy’s position. At that time Skobelev felt, more than anyone, the stupidity and folly of our generosity, or rather cowardice, call it what we will, because he knew better than all, that we could only have real weight at a Congress if we had Constantinople in our possession.

“I would hold a Congress here, and would myself preside, with three hundred thousand bayonets round me, so as to be prepared for all eventualities. Then we could talk to them!”

“But suppose all Europe should oppose us?”

“There are moments when one must not, when it is even criminal to, be prudent, that is, too cautious. Our honour will not allow us to go back. We shall have to wait a few more centuries before another opportunity will present itself in which circumstances will be so favourable as they are now. You think the bulldogs will come and fight us? Never. It will cost them an effort even to wring from us a bribe in the form of a bit of Syria. Besides—there is no time for reflection: we are here, this is ours; and it

should be our duty to defend this, our own, to the last drop of our blood."

"You cannot suppose that Constantinople could be suddenly transformed into a Russian town?"

"I am no diplomatist. I do not see why it is not to be a free town with a Russian garrison. And as to a coalition—it is not so easy to get one up as you seem to think. In the first place there is no one, and it is to no one's advantage, to fight us. Of course, if we are going to be faint-hearted we shall blunder away till we get a coalition against us; but at present I do not see its imminence. Imagine what Europe would say if, in view of her demands, insulting to our national honour, the Emperor should appeal to the nation."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, simply this. He would call his people together and tell them: 'I have brought our Russian affair to an end, and now all Europe is upon us. I leave the matter in your hands.' What an enthusiasm such a speech would call forth, what hidden strength we would lay bare! And would not the sentimentalities of European diplomacy be forced to give way before the national will, before the determined resistance of the whole nation?"

In saying he was no diplomatist Skobelev was very modest. At Constantinople he got on such intimate terms with Sir Henry Layard that he found out all the secrecies of English calculations, their hopes and their intrigues. Layard, an enemy *par excellence*, did not suspect Skobelev in the least; the whole English colony at Constantinople carried him in their arms. He was

the friend of them all, even of the ladies; they were all for him.

"I must tell you honestly," one of these informed Skobelev on his being introduced to her, "that I hate Russians!"

"And I only see a beauty before me, and, without asking what nation she belongs to, must do homage to her," Skobelev replied.

At luncheons with Schuyler and dinners with Layard Skobelev studied the English, and he became convinced of one thing:

"They are themselves afraid, they are themselves unprepared for war. They are like gamblers; they will be resolute until the final decisive moment. When that moment comes they will *not* stake their all."

On the day when he called on us at Constantinople he was especially excited.

"We can do only one of two things. Either we must be content to be classed as a second-rate Power and lose all our importance, or else we must stake our all. Sometimes defeat itself is not so dreadful, so ruinous, as a confession of one's own degradation and helplessness. If we go back now, if we should meanly play the part of a vassal before Europe, then this victorious war of ours will prove a much heavier blow even than Sebastopol. Sebastopol woke us up; 1878 may send us to sleep again; and when we may wake again Allah only knows, and He will not disclose it. Ah! bad, bad! Under Plevna I felt better than I do here. It is close. Let us go and lunch with McGahan."

I dressed and went with him. We had not gone

very far along the Grande Rue de Pera when we came against a most extraordinarily habilitated individual. He had a red fez on his head, a torn Russian officer's uniform coat, and a Turkish officer's cloak over it. Skobeleff forgot he was a civilian for the time being.

"What does this mean? Who are you?"

"I am a prisoner, a Russian."

"Are you not ashamed of yourself, to dress like that? If you must go out, you need not put on the Turkish uniform. It is a disgrace! And that is a Russian," he said, turning to us, when we got near the Hôtel d'Angleterre where McGahan was staying.

"Do you know," he said, a little later, "perhaps the poor fellow simply had nothing else to wear. I am very much ashamed of myself for my loss of temper. How are you to get into a prisoner's heart? Perhaps he has suffered enough here. Why did I abuse him?"

"I am very much ashamed of myself," he said again to McGahan. "Will you do me a favour?" he said to me.

"What can I do?"

"How much money have we all got here? I have twenty gold pieces, but that is not enough. However, I shall make McGahan lend me some."

He borrowed from him about as much again, or more, and said:

"Will you go to Seraskeriat for me, where our prisoners are—there are about three or four officers there and a few privates—and give them this?" and he gave me some forty or fifty half-imperials. Tell them

how sorry I am for them, and especially ask their pardon for my rudeness. You will know how to do that. I would go myself, only I must not show myself at Seraskeriat."

I mounted one of the horses which do duty in the streets of Constantinople for hackney-carriages, and rode off to the Turkish quarter of the town of Stamboul. It was with difficulty I succeeded in making my way through the multitudes of soldiers on their way to Seraskeriat. Arrived there, I applied to the officials. At first they would not even listen to me ; but on learning that I was a Russian they changed their manner towards me completely.

"You must get an order from Réouff Pasha to see the prisoners !"

"And where is Réouff ?"

"He has gone off to San Stefan, to your headquarters."

"Who has charge of the prisoners ?"

"Major So-and-so."

"Take me to him."

I was brought before a stout and phlegmatic gentleman, who did not appear to understand me. He was ignorant of any European language.

At last I found a Crim Tartar who spoke French and acted as my interpreter. The major refused to grant me my request.

"Tell him," I said, "that I will not leave this until I see the prisoners"; and to give my speech a little emphasis I composed myself as comfortably as possible on the divan, with an air of intending to

remain on it. The Meir-Alay was a little startled, and commenced sucking his pipe thoughtfully.

“Could you give him a little backsheesh?”

“I shan’t even give him so much,” I replied, showing the point of my finger.

They talked a little, and after a few minutes I was informed that the major was prepared to let me see the prisoners provided I consented to put myself under the convoy of himself and two Circassians; to this I agreed.

I was led to the casemate where the prisoners were detained, a door was shown me in the long passage, and my guards remained outside while I went in.

I there found two officers, one of which being the very one whom Skobeleff had abused so tremendously. He was a cornet of Cossacks. I gave them Skobeleff’s message and the money, and then returned.

“Well, and what?” Skobeleff asked impatiently.

“I gave him the money.”

“Was he very angry? Did you make my apologies?”

“Yes.”

“And was he satisfied?”

I assured Skobeleff he was.

“Nevertheless it was a most unpardonable outburst on my part. Write me a report of the condition in which you found the prisoners. It is a disgrace that we have not demanded their release. Though certainly I do not approve——”

“Of what?”

"How can an officer allow himself to be made prisoner?"

"But what is he to do?"

"What they did at Shipka. A revolver has six charges; five for the enemy, one for oneself."

"Perhaps he wants to enjoy life still."

"This is a matter of principle. What is life? One must be always prepared for death. Besides, the life of an individual is of no consequence."

A few days later Skobelev was put in a very comical position. We had gone together to the Concordia at Constantinople, where there were French singers and roulette. One of the young artistes attached herself to Skobelev, and made him give her half-imperials which she kept losing at roulette.

"Do you know," he said, "it is great fun to go about like this and not to be recognised, to be a *bon bourgeois*! It is a sort of relaxation. It is very pleasant to be a nobody."

At last the thing bored him; we got up and left. On our way down-stairs we were overtaken by the little Frenchwoman.

"I have a favour to ask," she said.

"And what may it be?"

"Will you allow us to bring our troupe to visit you and give you a few concerts?"

"Where do you want to come to? Whom do you take me for?"

"Oh! *mon général*! we all know you, you are General Skobelev, Akh-Pasha."

Skobelev was very much amused.

But he spent very little time in idleness. From morning to night he reconnoitred the ground round Constantinople with his officers, inspected his troops, held manœuvres, sham attacks, drilled some regiments which had got a little disorganised during the march, and in the course of a very short time got them into wonderful discipline again. Later, when typhus and malaria raged all round, Skobelev's army corps was the only one that had not a single man in the hospitals. As soon as disease showed itself anywhere Skobelev was on the spot, roused the doctor, and put the whole medical staff on its mettle. His men's quarters were always patterns of order, and everything was foreseen. His men were so quickly rested and restored that they were ready for fresh feats.

"We must not think ourselves safe yet. There will be time for rest later—now we must keep our eyes open."

I heard a very witty remark about Skobelev at that time.

"What is Skobelev doing?" I enquired of a private.

"He is going about Constantinople like a tom-cat smelling round a mouse-trap. Sometimes he pats it with his paw, and sometimes he pulls himself together and shakes himself."

"I am very much afraid lest Skobelev should prepare a benefit for us," said one of the influential generals.

"How could he do that?"

"Well, on some fine morning we may wake up and

find that Skobelev has crept into Constantinople over night with all his men."

In view of this contingency Skobelev's relaxations in Constantinople were very useful to him.

I saw his sketches and plans, in which he had marked all the streets which lay on the road to Stamboul, and had noted points for various military operations. In other words, promenading along Constantinople, Skobelev had studied the town so well, that, had a battle broken out in its streets, he would have been able to take advantage of every turning and corner, every lane and court. Nothing escaped his vigilant eyes. He was so fond of knowing everything, being ready for every possible event, and to know the conditions which he would be likely to have to fight against, that a fortnight had not elapsed before he knew Constantinople thoroughly. He knew all the parties in it, the Mussulman clique, the grievances of the Circassians, the strength of the Ulemas, the imperceptible growth of liberal principles among the population of the eastern city, the officials of the Sublime Porte, the military of Seraskeriat. One would have thought Skobelev was preparing to become a Turkish minister, so minute and detailed was his information. The editors of the "Bassiret," and "Vakit," the French, English and Italian newspapers published there, were all known to him. He knew all the Greek journalists living in Byzantium, the merchants, everything and everybody, their opinions, and all their dreams, aspirations, and programmes.

"What do you want to know all that for?" he was asked.

"It is a habit of mine. I like to be at home wherever I am ; I hate vacua and misunderstandings."

I have stated above that to be an officer under Skobelev meant to learn and study. Nowhere was the truth of this observation more evident than at Constantinople. Young officers were sent over there for three or four days to enjoy themselves, and then to return to their work. Woe betide the young man who failed to bring useful information back with him to camp.

"It is no use giving you leave of absence, my little soul ; you do not know how to profit by your opportunities."

"He is a most remarkable man," a Greek told me, speaking of Skobelev. "The other evening I called on him. The conversation accidentally turned on the industrial interests of the town, and he proved to be completely conversant with the whole subject. I was quite amazed when he commenced talking about our new projected water-supply, proposed by our Greeks, or the new chateau to replace the Galatzky Palace, which we want to build. I asked whether he had not lived at Constantinople before."

"Akh-Pasha would make a good Mussulman," one of the Ulemas of Stamboul told me.

"What makes you think so ?"

"He knows the Koran."

Yes, he knew it, and even quoted it frequently.

At this time Skobelev's character had already acquired some of its remarkable traits. One of those military men, who possess the unenviable habit of

rushing in where angels fear to tread, met Skobeleff at Constantinople. Skobeleff liked him very much, because the above habit did not prevent him from being an amusing companion and a brave soldier. Lunching one day at the Hôtel d'Angleterre, this gentleman commenced, apparently quite accidentally, to retail to Skobeleff all manner of small scandal.

"Do you know, General, you should show a little more severity towards your young knights."

"In what respect?"

"In the first place, they are given to coming here for dissipation."

"And what are we doing here, Colonel?"

"How can you compare——"

"Then you think we may go on the spree because we can afford to have champagne, but they must not because they cannot take anything more expensive than brandy?"

"Well, but they have another fault, besides."

"And what may that be?"

"They are not all so devoted to you as you seem to think."

"Now, there you make a mistake. I know them well."

"Well, do you know what one of them said of you?"

And here commenced a most unceremonious washing of dirty linen.

"And now I will tell you his name."

But Skobeleff seized him by the arm, and exclaimed:

"I entreat you, not another word about it, don't

mention his name. I love my knights too much, I owe them too much. During the whole campaign they faced death at a single word from me. I do not wish to know who said this of me, because I do not wish to be unjust. A falsehood like that may unconsciously drop from the mouth of a man whose only faults may be that he has taken too much wine, and has placed his confidence in one who was unworthy of it. Yes," said Skobelev, raising his voice, "one who was unworthy of his confidence."

When luncheon was over, and the Colonel had made his bow, Skobelev called his man :

"Did you notice the face of the gentleman who has just left me?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Well, then, remember that I am never again at home to him."

Holding a high rank in the army, Skobelev had frequently to hear tales of this kind from men desirous of advancing themselves in his favour at the expense of their comrades.

"I am obliged to listen to them, for I cannot stuff my ears," Skobelev used to say, "but mentally I put a mark against their names, and make the memorandum 'a fool and a sneak.' A sneak because he slanders others, and especially his comrades; and a fool because he thinks that I want to be told, that I have not eyes in my head, and do not know what is going on around me, and who is an honest fellow and who not."

One of his subordinates was in great difficulties at this time. Skobelev wished to relieve his necessities,

but did not know how. At last he called him one day and said: "You have got money sent you from Russia, here it is," and gave him a lump of gold-pieces. The other took them without even asking who had sent them.

A little time elapsed, and he again appeared before Skobelev:

"What can I do for you?"

"I have come to know whether any more money has been sent me from Russia."

"Yes, of course. I had quite forgotten it. Here it is."

Later on this gentleman showed his gratitude in an original way by robbing his benefactor.

Skobelev appointed an officer to superintend his expenses and keep his accounts. This officer ran up his accounts to five or six hundred pounds in a fortnight.

"That cannot be," everyone exclaimed. "Have his books checked."

"On no account whatever. The fault in the first instance is mine, because I appointed him myself. Pay it without a word. Of course, he must not again be appointed to any responsible post, he must not receive any pecuniary commissions to execute; and, secondly, if these had been public moneys, or those of a stranger, it would have been a very different matter. In the course of a very short time I shall discover that my division is not suitable for him, and he will go off himself."

He parted from his immediate subordinates very reluctantly, and forgave with difficulty those who left him of their own accord.

“I like N——, he is brave and useful, but I won’t have him.”

“Why not?”

“He left me once. That was not treating me like a good comrade.”

Those who exchanged their uniform for that of the police he would not hear of.

“Don’t speak about him. A brave fighting officer, and to end like that!”

When friends asked favours for such, he replied impatiently: “Not a word. I tell you honestly I won’t help him. He is not dying of starvation. You know how I hate that arm of the service.”

One of these came to him weeping, and told him all the conditions of his new service.

“I pity you.”

“Take me back!”

“There I must ask to be excused. Why should I insult my other officers? I can give you but one advice, leave the service.”

At Constantinople and before it he used to hold long discussions; and then the period of the Berlin Congress commenced, a period of concessions and diplomatic intrigues. Skobelev used to get quite furious. He did not sleep for nights together.

“What will become of Russia! What will become of Russia, if she gives up everything! And even if she only gives up a part, retreats but a pace from where she has gone! What was this war for, and all these sacrifices?”

I shall never forget the last evening I spent with

him. We were both sitting on a balcony at San Stefano. In front the waves of the Bosphorus stretched out into the azure twilight. They were gentle caressing waves, full of calm and peace, like the melodious whisperings of women, as they flowed along the silent shore. A few boats were gently rocking at the landing-stage. The silver tips of the Olympus of Asia Minor stood out in the nocturnal darkness. Our conversation turned on the future of the Slavs. Skobelev was, of course, for a confederation of the smaller tribes with the larger ones.

“The Servian and Tcheck will never give up their independence and freedom for the honour of belonging to Russia.”

“No one supposes they would. On the contrary, I look forward towards a free confederation of all Slavonic tribes, each with a complete autonomy of its own—only one thing in common—its army, its coin, and its custom duties. In other respects let each live as it likes, and rule its own country as it can. And as to freedom, I am not speaking of to-morrow. By that time, perhaps, Russia will be more free than they are. Already free air blows about pretty breezily in it; wait a little. Of course we shall lose everything if we return to the *status quo ante*. Tribes and nationalities do not understand Platonic love. If things remain unchanged they will group round Austria, and will found with her a Southern Slavonic monarchy—then we are lost.”

“Why so?”

“Because with the aid of Austria Roman Catholicism

will ramify them all. It will seize each and several, and at the first sore question the Slavs of the south will range themselves against those of the north, and such a fratricidal war would be a triumph for every German lackey. But it is impossible and impossible. If we shut ourselves up, and if we wall ourselves in from every new principle of statecraft—it will go bad with us. The wisdom of our statesmen might go as far as that. But at present it is our mission to defend these tribes. Unless we do so we shall ourselves become animals, we shall lose our usefulness, our historical *raison d'être*. My motto is short: Love of country, freedom, science, and Slavs! On these four piers we can erect a political power which shall make us fear neither our friends nor our enemies. But we must not think of our bellies. For so great an object let us bring every sacrifice. If life should be hard to us, our posterity will find it easier.”

“And when will the object be gained?” I inquired, sceptically, after a pause.

“When we shall have so much spiritual food that we shall be able to share it with others; and when we shall be free, and the bright luminance of our freedom shall shine forth to be seen by the whole world.”

“And till then?”

“And till then we must hope, we must trust. We must not hang our heads, and we must not lose our kinship with the nations of our race, nor the consciousness of our nationality.”

At this moment the sounds of a song were carried

across the water to our ears. The tune was noble and soul-inspiring, and fitted well with the beautiful southern night, the glorious stars studding the firmament and the resplendent azure sea. The song was sung by many voices. One could hear the singers were excited, a common sympathy of feeling seemed to unite them.

"Do you know what it is they are singing?" Skobelev asked.

I replied in the negative.

"I did not know myself till recently. I have heard it often, and so asked to know what it meant. Those are young Greek shopmen from Constantinople. They are mercenary traders, and yet they sing of the past greatness of the Hellenes, of the universal power of ancient Greece—they sing that this sea, and that eternal city, will belong to them; that all nations and peoples will come and do them homage, and that there will be a new Greece which will again send the rays of her learning amongst the barbarians, and teach them the sweetness of peace and the magnificence of freedom! That is what small and insignificant little Greece is singing about, this infusorium of Europe; and look with what enthusiasm, power, and passion! And we! Ough! it makes me ill to think of it."

I had soon to leave for Russia.

Skobelev took leave of me in camp. He was then fine, strong, and hearty. He was forming; he was not yet great, but he already had all the ingredients of greatness. A year later he grew more serious; he had seen much and learned more.

“What shall I send you from Peter ?” (St. Petersburg).

“Books, books, and books. All that has appeared lately, all that is clever and worth reading. A greater pleasure you could not give me.”

I carried with me an exalted idea of the richly endowed character I had left behind, and all I subsequently heard of Skobelev, all he wrote to me, only served to confirm my opinion. At the period of general dissatisfaction which followed the Berlin Congress, when everyone was more or less dissatisfied with our spiritless diplomacy, and had let his hands drop and his head hang, when the last rays of brightness and hope seemed for ever to be lost in the dense fog of the clouds in which the future seemed enveloped, Skobelev lost neither his energy nor his thirst for work. On the contrary, he stood to his post like a true soldier. When the peace-loving old women of diplomacy had partitioned Bulgaria, Skobelev at once commenced organising gymnasiums and *Turn-Vereine*, volunteers, rifle-associations, &c. &c. He himself taught them their drill, and was indefatigable in his travels from one town to another. In one he held reviews, appointed officers of his own to teach the people their drill, in another he made them throw up earthworks and dig trenches, put his own troops behind them and made the Bulgarians attack them ; then he put the Bulgarians inside, and himself showed them how to defend themselves. In the intervals he pacified Servians and Bulgarians among each other, encouraged the Roumelians with his speeches. Possess-

ing, as he did, the faculty of condensing ideas and views into a single epigrammatical phrase, he convinced the people of his relationship to them. He raised their spirit, and made them participate in that liveliness which was the key to his own character. "You have quite lost yourselves," he wrote to me at St. Petersburg; "you have got into such a muddle that you will not be able to get out of it again. But we are not losing time, and are mending the breaches made by the Berlin Congress. If we leave Bulgaria in a mutilated condition now, halved or even quartered, we will leave such an impression of blood-relationship on the Bulgarians, so deep a conviction of the inevitability of their becoming sooner or later united with us, that all those gentlemen will soon feel how little success has attended their efforts. And, in addition, we leave in so-called Roumelia thirty-thousand well-disciplined troops. These are used to carry arms, and will show the others how to do so in case of need. All these athletic associations and unions may, of course, be dissolved, but they will do their work, and when they are wanted they will swim to the surface. When you come you will see for yourself."

And thus Skobelev left behind him a reputation such as falls to the lot of few.

"When we shall be forced to rise he will appear amongst us. He will lead us, and the Servians, and the Montenegrins; and then the Swabians will come to grief!"

This was on the lips of every Roumelian street-boy.

“He will know how to teach us and how to weave us together.”

Indeed the entire South Slavonic world would have followed him. We can imagine what a blow the news of his sudden death must have been to them! How they must have wept, how they must have prayed for him!

On the first day after his death I had just left the Hôtel Duseaux, when an intelligent and highly-educated Bulgarian threw himself in my arms.

“We have lost everything with him! He was our hope, he was our future!”

I had not gone much further before other Bulgarians, living at Moscow, surrounded me.

“You have seen him: can he possibly be dead?”

I doubt whether sincerer tears have ever been shed.

“Bulgaria weeps now, like a bereaved mother over her only son.”

At St. Petersburg I received a telegram to the following effect: “Is it true that our Skobeleff is dead? The whole town is weeping, every house is mourning. Peasants are coming in multitudes from Samovod and other villages to learn the truth of their national calamity. The mountain village of Ruish has sent a deputy to make enquiries. Women and children are in tears. He is being prayed for at the churches. It is long before the Slavonic cause will have another such hero!”

I returned and looked into his calm and passive face, and asked myself why he did leave us, he who

was so indispensable, so dear? Round him, in preparation for the evening mass, flowers and plants had been arranged, and in the midst of these flowers, surmounted by a wreath of green laurel, lay that talented head. A nun was sitting reading a psalter in a corner, an odour of incense pervaded the room.

And that hand, which struck fear into the whole world, now lay gently, helplessly folded on his bosom; it will no longer lead his legions into fight and direct them against the foes. His loud, clear voice was now silent for ever; and his fearless, bright eyes were now dim and heavy under his half-closed eye-lids.

"This seems like a bad dream," said someone; "a bad dream. We shall wake, and all this will pass away."

Two sentinels were marched in and put on guard over the corpse.

One of these looked and looked on that lifeless face; he was too well drilled to weep on sentry duty, but still the tears rolled down his cheeks along his beard—and he dared not even wipe them away!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

I DID not see Skobeleff again till long after the war. In the few letters I received from him he continued to put questions with his former uncompromising force and brevity, and sketched people and events with the same epigrammatic truthfulness as before. He was pleased with his army-corps, but peace and peaceful activity did not seem to suit him. On returning from Bulgaria he wrote: "Now I can rest with a clear conscience, indeed it is time. My strength is slightly failing me. I will go to Paris for relaxation." But two months later he wrote as follows: "This mundane life wearies me. To-day is like yesterday, to-morrow like to-day. There is no excitement. We have all gone to sleep. We are again trifling. Our recent indignation is extinguished—indeed, how could we expect it to be otherwise of people who have survived the Berlin Treaty? At present the best we can do is to be silent. We have disgraced ourselves for ever!" Nevertheless he took a great interest in everything that was going on. He read and worked,

and commenced studying Prussia, going there to attend the manœuvres, and managed to make himself so well acquainted with the German army that our dear neighbours were then already somewhat uneasy about him. From his conversations with Berlin generals and his knowledge of the Prussian army, Skobelev became convinced that Germany was seriously preparing for war with Russia.

“We shall again play the part of the foolish virgins in the gospel; war will again find us unprepared.”

And he commenced preparing for it with all possible energy. Scarcely a pamphlet on military matters published in Germany escaped him; he read their military periodicals. He studied the country thoroughly, journeyed round its borders, and, never resting, kept continually working, working, and working.

“This is a time when one must watch and be standing sentry. The men did not call me a cock for nothing: I must watch, and, should the least danger threaten us, I shall crow in time.”

He had noticed that the Germans were desirous of concealing the new cavalry exercises which they were preparing in the event of a war. But Skobelev, with the quickness of genius, saw and grasped the new system, imported it into Russia, developing and changing it a good deal. The Germans he understood better than anyone else. He had never trusted their friendship, and he never counted on their gratitude. Poland, with all its strategic points, had been so carefully and minutely studied that his notes on this subject are sure to be indispensable to our future generals in the event

of war. He had prepared plans for a campaign against the honest brokers, our kind allies. Of course I am not at liberty to speak of this plan here. On meeting him again I found him as energetic and excitable as I had been accustomed to see him before. He had come to St. Petersburg to bury his father.

"To my great surprise I find myself a rich man! And I am glad of it!"

"I should think so."

"But not for my own sake. Now I can help my old companions-in-arms. I am thinking of domiciling retired soldiers on my estate. I shall give them some sort of occupation, so that they may not think they are eating their bread for nothing. And when I die I shall leave my Spassky estate in my will to be a home for old soldiers."

"What are you thinking of death so early for?"

"Well, there's my father—chatted and disputed with you on the very day before his death. We are all under Providence. Of one thing I am certain; when I die I shall not die of myself, not a natural death."

"Anything else!"

"It is not a mere foreboding, I have my reasons for thinking so! But why should we talk about it?"

A little later we talked about his appointment to the Akhal Tekké expedition.

He had himself desired and applied for it. In the first place, action was to his taste, and, secondly, he had a deep conviction that the Eastern question would be partly solved behind the walls of Tekké.

"It is a great link in our chain. The more prestige

we have in the East the better. Only it will be difficult to correct the mistakes of all the geniuses that have gone before. Besides, you don't know the Government of the Caucasus."

"No."

"But I know it. It watches everyone with feminine jealousy. They will sooner put difficulties in my way than help me."

He prepared for the expedition with a feverish eagerness. He had scarcely left the council of war before he sat down, wrote notes on the subject of the expedition, entered into communication with a mass of people to whom different commissions relative to the expedition had been confided, and besides this discovered and frustrated several "friendly services" offered him by well-wishers. His *entourage* were run off their feet. His house on the Mokhovaya was turned into a sort of miniature head-quarters. Grodekoff, who was then only Colonel, Skobelev's principal assistant, and Baranok, as well as other aides-de-camp, rushed about like madmen, pale and worn.

"There is no time to rest, no time. Let us to work!"

"God only knows when he sleeps. Our hands and feet fail us," they said.

From morning to night his rooms were crowded with officers, either waiting for appointments or already appointed. Others, like Captain Massloff, he had himself invited.

"A difficult business, very difficult!" he exclaimed.

"A large army cannot be taken, the thieves have cost

Russia quite enough money as it is, and if we do not give them the *coup de grâce* all our Turkestan possessions will find themselves in a precarious state. Besides, we have already spent a lot! And then the commissariat! Should I be appointed I will inaugurate my appointment by confiding the victualling and provisioning of the army to men I know and can trust, and I will send all the gentlemen of the commissariat back to the Caucasus again. Every strap or buckle you want to get has to pass through the hands of at least five officials over there. The troops are splendid, but they have been badly led."

To tell the truth, the Government of the Caucasus was not very affectionately disposed towards Skobelev. I was told that some of the officials over there even refused to have masses said for his soul. Indeed there need be no wonder at their little love for him. Imagine an active man like Skobelev exploding as it were amongst them in their stagnant pool of officialism.

"They will make it hot for him over there," I was told.

"They will be unable to do anything."

"It is hard to say. They are very good at hissing."

Skobelev knew this perfectly, and was prepared for every eventuality.

"They wanted to make a little Daghestan out of Akhal Tekké."

"In what way?"

"Why, they would have extended it over ten years. Everyone who wanted distinction and orders would have gone there, made attacks and raids, and then

returned. Armenian contractors would have put the millions of the State into their pockets, and typhoid fevers and all manner of disease would have come to the aid of all these people! whilst the Imperial expenditure would have grown from year to year. All the Caucasians are hungry, you know, and philo-progenitive. Their families are not in proportion to their pockets. God has blessed them with children, and all that has to be fed out of the Imperial exchequer. But I am your obedient servant. I won't let them rob my soldiers. That I shall not allow."

"They will find means of stealing even under the new *régime*."

"We shall see. I shall not stand on ceremony, you know. I shall shoot them down unmercifully for that sort of thing. In this case kindness is worse than cruelty. If you are lenient with these pater-familias your whole army will die of typhus, and tens of millions of the national money will unaccountably disappear. But my system is simple. To-day he is tried before a drum-head court-martial, to-morrow he is shot down. The others will get out of the habit."

CHAPTER XXXV.

EVERYONE knows of Skobelev's Akhal-Tekké expedition. Here he was alone; he went without correspondents, and there was no one who could be accused of being bribed to describe the General's exploits in glowing colours. During his absence all manner of exaggerated rumours were retailed about St. Petersburg and Moscow concerning the fate of his army. The storming of the Tekké fortress and the conquest of the whole oasis took everyone, therefore, by complete surprise. For those who are desirous of making themselves thoroughly acquainted with this period of Skobelev's activity I should recommend the perusal of a work by one of his best friends and comrades A. N. Massloff, entitled "The Conquest of Akhal Tekké!" This is the diary of one who took a part in the expedition. With a lively and gifted hand the author here sketches Skobelev's strategic plans, and his personal life, as well as the life of his men, on the golden sands of the trans-Caspian deserts.

After the Akhal-Tekké expedition I met Skobelev accidentally in the streets of St. Petersburg.

“Why did you not come and see me at Akhal-Tekké?”

“But you would not have any correspondents.”

“You should not ask, but come. If you ask permission you prove thereby that you are yourself in doubt, and then you set people thinking whether they can let you come. But if you go straight on, the question of possibility is thereby decided. I myself hate asking. Take everything on your own responsibility, and never ask permission. But you were expected amongst us. There were many of your old companions-in-arms there.”

And now, looking at him attentively, I saw a great change in Skobelev's appearance. It was evident that the cares of command had had their effect on him. He had grown thin and wrinkled. Lines lay on his forehead, a sort of fold was between his eye-brows. His eyes had the determination as of old, the same energy was in his face, but the whole man made the impression of having gone through much; there was an air of melancholy about him. I got him to talk about the campaign.

“It is not the expedition itself which has had such an effect on me; although there were some terrible moments. My army was small, the enemy powerful! But what of that! I have faced worse foes than they! The death of my mother, however, has been a very great blow to me. Her murdered body was always before me! And who should have done it, but one who owes his all to me, positively his all! I went about like a madman for the first few days. Her

image is still before me, as though it were calling me. And, do you know, I feel as though I myself had not long to live."

"At thirty-seven!"

"Yes. There is too much inflammable material round me! Too much! And I have so many well-wishers that I shall not be able to master them all. The open foe is not so terrible. However, I shall go over to Paris, to rest and pacify myself."

How Skobelev rested at Paris everyone knows. His was a constitution which knew no rest and could form no conception thereof.

After his speech at Paris we did not meet again for a long, long time. I saw him a few weeks before his death at Moscow. And that was our last meeting. I found him at the "Slavyansky Bazaar," a hotel at Moscow. He was quite restored to health, strong and cheerful. When I expressed my surprise he laughed.

"I am always well when I have much to do. Do you know I am head-over-ears in work, preparing for a great undertaking. Besides, the Germans have given me much, very much amusement. These dumplings are very angry with me. Now it is some sergeant who sends me a challenge, now a sentimental Berlin widow writing me a long sermon about the sweets of peace and friendship, or else it is the inventor of some new muzzle for dogs which he has called Skobelev's who very properly informs me of his invention; and sometimes I receive copies of their humorous papers, in which I am represented in some unenviable situation. I know

you were against my Parisian speech ; but I spoke from conviction and do not repent it. We are too mean-spirited. Believe me, if we should always speak in such terms, Europe would pay the greatest attention to us. Our kind neighbours, so long as we sing a peaceful tune, are exacting and insolent, like a footman who feels his power. But when we put our demand with firmness they place their tails between their legs and develop a most commendable modesty ! I am no enemy of Russia. I know the terrors of war, perhaps as well as anyone ; but there are times when a nation should stake its all. And, believe me, those gentlemen will not dare to risk a war with us. They use our fears very adroitly, gather us up in their hands and show us one bogey after another ; but as soon as we show our claws in our turn, they are the first to seek cover. But these claws must be shown at once, and our friends must be made to feel them."

And he cited a mass of historical instances, Russian and foreign, in illustration of his argument.

A little later Loduigensky and Khloudoff joined us. We sat down to lunch. The conversation turned at once on the present strained economical and moral condition of Russia. Evidently all this excited Skobeleff greatly, and he commenced describing, in his happy epigrammatic manner, the characteristics of some of our statesmen of the day. The result of the conversation was unconsoling in the highest degree.

"Nevertheless, the future is ours. We shall survive this epoch. We have strength enough. Thank God, Russia will not crumble to pieces on that account."

He then grew more cheerful, and commenced reciting verses from the poems of Tyoutcheff and Khomyakoff. He recited them splendidly, giving every poetical image a peculiar brilliancy and colour, every phrase force of expression. At last he became so excited that he ran up-stairs to fetch a new edition of the works of these poets only just then published and presented him by Aksakoff.

“I am not boring you?”

“Not in the least.”

The conversation then went on to the press, and Skobelev spoke up for its freedom.

“I cannot see why people should be so afraid of it. Lately it has been decidedly the friend of the Government. All great robberies and malpractices have been pointed out by it. I can perfectly understand that some of our statesmen may well have reason to dread it. That is quite conceivable; but why does Government hold such a suspicious attitude towards it, why are they always thinking of curtailing its sphere of usefulness? If you like, under certain conditions of society, the press is a safety-valve. Superfluous dissatisfaction and bile go off through its agency. Even our writers speak of nothing else but the restriction of some literary reform or other. I think that from the conservative point of view even that sort of thing is not quite practical. I cannot, after all said and done, force all those to hold their peace who are not of my opinion. For the authorities a free press is a key, if you like, to public opinion. By its means Government can learn everything, get an idea of all parties, and see its friends

and its enemies. In Sweden, for instance, thieves are tried by special judges, and the press is superintended by a jury. With us, on the contrary, thieves and robbers enjoy the advantages of trial by jury, whilst our press is subjected to officials."

On the same day one of the editors of a Moscow paper called on Skobelev while I was there. I left him for a moment to chat with Loduigensky, the consul at Rustchuck, who was staying here for a time. On my return to Skobelev I found him smiling.

"The greatest enemy of the press is the press itself," he said. "Take, for instance, this man, a clever and enlightened man; do you know why he attacks Ignatieff? Because he will not suspend the 'Golos' and the 'Russki Misl.' Government cannot possibly become the organ of one particular paper, and undertake to defend it. If we were to do that, God knows what would become of us. As regards myself, I never felt any annoyance against the press. When it took up arms against me for my speech at Paris, I thought it was acting very honestly and discreetly. They wrote according to their convictions at the time; in their eyes I was dangerous. If they were once convinced of that, it would have been base to be silent; just as I was fully convinced that if I had been silent at Paris it would not have been to my credit. That is why I should never accept any administrative office.

"To thrash the enemy in open field, that is my business; but to put my teeth into his flesh in times of peace—there I am your humble servant and beg to be excused. There is Aksakoff, for instance; he is

quite a different sort of man. I love him dearly, and have never heard anything of the sort from him. Never has he advocated, in my presence, the necessity of shutting anyone's mouth."

We then commenced talking about the editor of "Russ."

"He is too much of an idealist. Yesterday he told me, 'The people are silent, but they have great thoughts in the depth of their souls. Now, I think that the people have no deep thoughts at all. That the people are starving and do not know how to get bread, that is quite true. You have just travelled through a good half of Russia: tell me what is going on.'"

I related my impressions; told him of the factories where, notwithstanding the perfection our manufactures had attained, half the hands had been discharged because our Custom-house system was all based on the encouragement of foreign manufactures; told him of the exhaustion of the soil, of the decline of cattle-breeding, the increase of destitution which was growing not merely daily but hourly.

"It is horrible, horrible!" he exclaimed. "I was saying the same only yesterday; but I was not believed—I was exaggerating!"

Our conversation was interrupted by a Russo-German with the ribbon of the Vladimir Order in his button-hole.

"What is it I can do for you?"

"I want to see a large canal." The man spoke broken Russian.

"Where, in what direction?"

“I want to unite two seas, the Aral and the Caspian, for the enrichment of all Russia. It would be a great benefit to unite these two seas.”

A satirical smile passed over Skobelev's features.

“And how can I help you?”

“I have come to you, your Excellency, for introductions and assistance in carrying out this scheme, which——”

“Will you be kind enough to explain its essential points?”

Skobelev sat down, and so did the gentleman desirous of enriching all Russia. A long and tiresome explanation of all the advantages of the scheme was entered into. Skobelev now and then made an observation which knocked all the other's arguments and projects on the head. It was clear that Skobelev knew the neighbourhood as well as anyone could.

“How much capital is required for the project?”

“Oh, in comparison with the benefit it will effect, a mere trifle.”

“But for instance?”

“If the Government were prepared to expend about forty or fifty million roubles——”

Skobelev smiled again.

“Of course, of course, I quite follow you. But there is one consideration. Would you be so good as to point out to me where we are to take this little sum from?”

“Oh! for a country so large and rich as Russia, and for an object so——” and here the German plunged into an ocean of arguments for the advantages of his scheme.

I did not remain to hear the end of this wonderful scheme, and left Skobelev to the tender mercies of this new Gargantua, who possessed an appetite to the tune of forty million roubles.

As we were going together to O. K., I came back in an hour and a half's time, and we proceeded forthwith to the house of the celebrated lady.

In the street he met one of his former subordinates, who had left the service. He had been through the war, but had held a very low rank; and evidently fortune had not favoured him much of late. He was at least very shabbily dressed. The retired officer tried to escape from Skobelev, but the latter had noticed him.

"N. N., what does this mean?—do you run away from an old comrade-in-arms?"

"Your Excellency—I did not dare, I am so badly dressed."

"Whom do you take me for? People dress for ladies. And you have never called on me. You knew I was here?"

"Yes, I saw it in the papers."

"Well?"

"I am, unfortunately, so situated——"

"That is very stupid of you. You should have come straight to me. A brave and honourable officer, you have every right to appeal for my aid and assistance."

I instantly recognised the old Skobelev. In this respect he had not changed.

"But I have fallen very low."

"I do not see it. Those who have exchanged their uniform for a more lucrative occupation have indeed

fallen low. To-day I leave for St. Petersburg. Give me your address. Are you in want of money? Mind, don't stand on ceremony with a comrade! A hundred roubles or two will not ruin me; and as soon as I have got you an appointment you can repay me, you know."

"No, thank you; I have enough money to last me for a month or two yet."

"Well, if you should want any, write to me. It is stupid to be shy with me. In the meantime I will try to find you a little work."

We met this officer later at Skobelev's funeral. He was well dressed and smart in appearance. Evidently Dame Fortune, of whose treatment he had complained so much, had changed towards him.

"It was all his doing," he said. "The —— came to me some days ago, and told me, 'I have just received a letter from Skobelev recommending you to me. That is enough'; and he at once offered me an appointment. I am now quite satisfied. The other day I learned that Skobelev was here, and so I came to see him, and found—— Do you know, he is the last! A comrade, a true comrade, though I was but a lieutenant and he a full general. There will be none like that any more. This is a middle-class age. Everyone is more or less of a lackey; if he is promoted to be body-servant, he will look down on the coachman."

At O. K's we met two Englishmen, with whom Skobelev commenced speaking English. They listened to him with enthusiasm. One of them said:

"You are the first to teach us to love even our enemy!"

"In what respect? Am I your enemy?"

"Who else could give us trouble in India?"

"We have no business there. We can live very well side by-side."

"Ah! yes; you tell that to our correspondents that they may put it in the papers. But we are not quite so naïve."

A fine smile appeared on Skobeleff's lips.

"I can assure you that is my conviction. But if we should have to knock against each other, the nearer the better."

"Oh dear no! peace is more precious than anything."

"Yes, for a rich man. But a hungry one who has nothing to lose thinks differently. However, we two have a common enemy."

"And who is that? Germany, I suppose?"

"Exactly. They have their mouths very widely open just now. Your fleet and your commerce can hardly please them very much."

"Yes, we know that."

When they had gone, Skobeleff commenced telling O. K. the impressions I had received of my journey through Russia.

"Where is a way out, where?"

"To close the frontier against the importation of all articles that we produce. Once and for all time to put on our banners 'Russia for the Russians,' and to lift that banner up high, and for the sake of this principle to stick at nothing; to speak powerfully, irrevocably, and forcibly; and, besides that, to do much in our own country: those are the means of salvation."

“What would you introduce in our country?”

And Skobelev expounded his programme, which had evidently been carefully prepared and thought out long before in all its details, and embraced the many-sidedness of our national life. Unfortunately I am unable to quote it.

I remained alone with Skobelev the whole evening, until the train left. Skobelev talked over old times, told me many interesting incidents of his life, passed on to the present and future of Russia; but a melancholy note seemed to ring in all his conversation. I accompanied him to the railway station. He talked all the way, without leaving off.

“Do you know, I think this is the last time that we shall see each other.”

“What spiritlessness!” I exclaimed involuntarily.

“How do you know? Something seems to tell me that my song has been sung to its end.”

He had expressed himself to the same effect several times in the course of that day before Loduigensky and Khloudoff.

“I shall not survive this year, that I am convinced of; although I don’t want to die at all. I should like to make a European war, to disperse Russia’s enemies, to annihilate them, and then—you may take my name off the books. But that will not be.”

I never saw Skobelev again.

On the occasion of his last visit to Moscow he had invited me to dine with him. I had made arrangements to do so when, in the morning, a footman ran into my room.

“ The General is dead ! ”

“ What general? What do I care ? ”

“ Skobeleff—Skobeleff is dead ! ”

“ Go to the devil. Don’t play your stupid jokes on me ! ”

The footman burst into tears. I understood that a great calamity had really befallen Russia. I rushed to Duseaux’s Hotel.

His presentiment had been justified—Skobeleff was no more.

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